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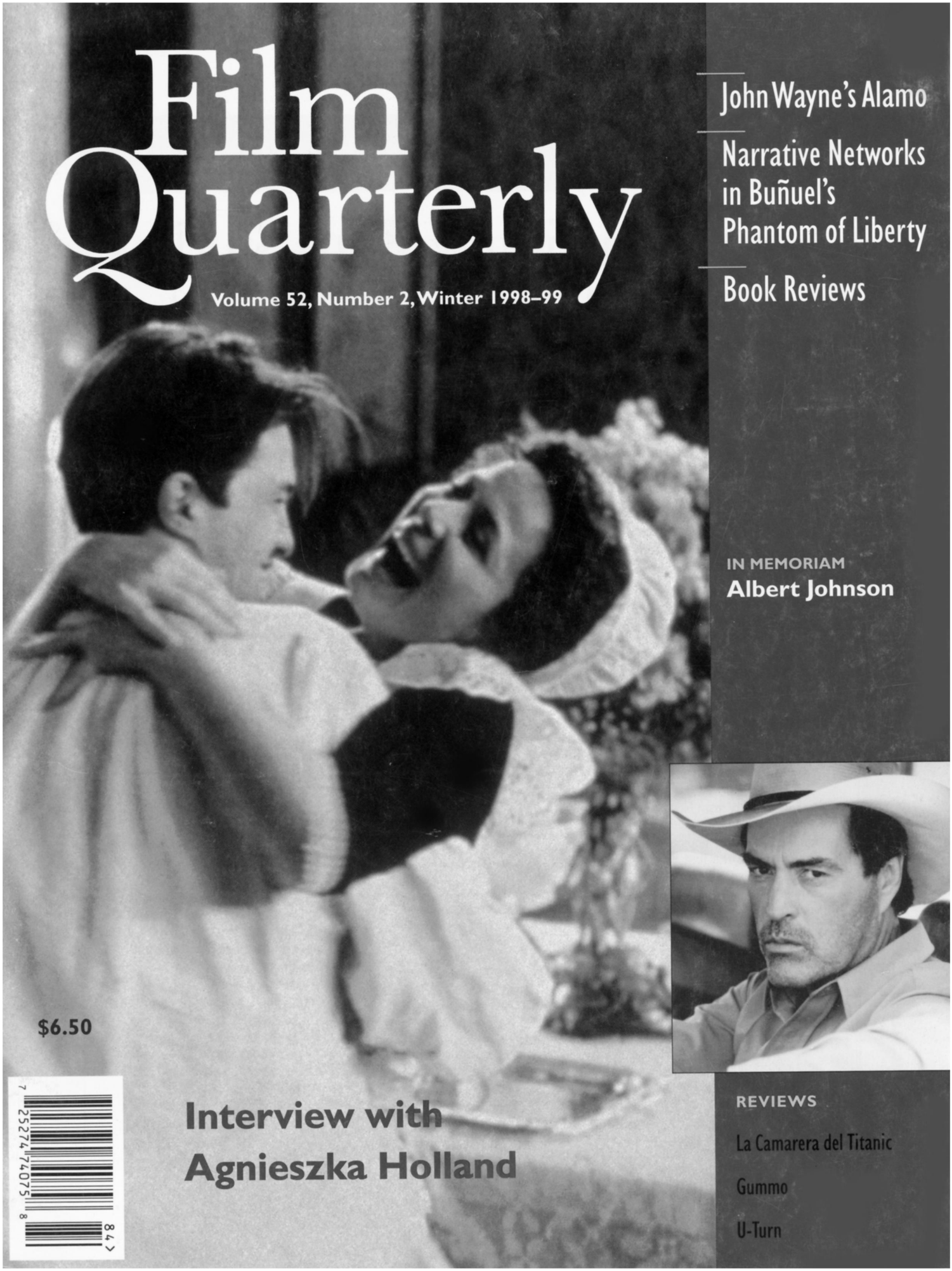

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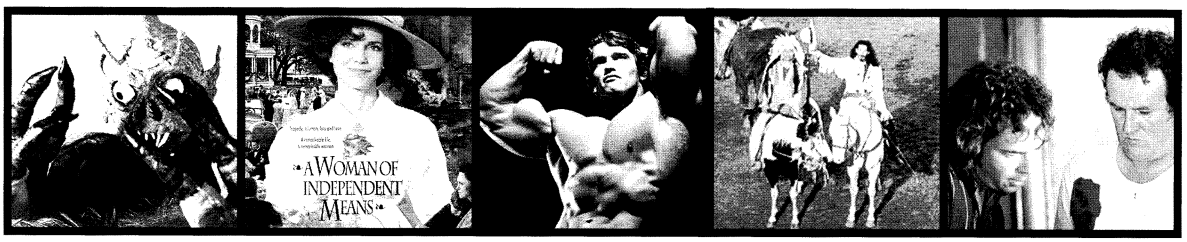

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Above: Production stills from films with Hollins connections: left to right, the space monster in *Frankenstein Meets the Space Monster*, written by Hollins professor Richard Dillard; *A Woman of Independent Means*, a novel by Hollins alumna Elizabeth Forsythe Hailey '60, which was turned into an Emmy-nominated miniseries; *Pumping Iron*, starring Arnold Schwarzenegger, written, directed, and produced by Hollins alumnus George Butler M.A. '68; *Buffalo Girls*, produced by Hollins alumna Sandy Saxon Brice '73; and *Four Days*, a film by Curtis Wehrfritz with screenplay by Hollins professor Pinckney Benedict.

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Pinckney Benedict, M.F.A. University of Iowa Writer's Workshop; screenwriter, novelist, playwright, and short fiction writer.

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Klaus Phillips, Ph.D., University of Texas-Austin; specialist in German cinema and editor of *New German Filmmakers*.

Stephen Prince, Virginia Tech; Ph.D., University of Pennsylvania; author of *Savage Cinema: Sam Peckinpah and the Rise of Ultraviolent Movies* (University of Texas Press, 1998).

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Film Quarterly

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Interview with

Agnieszka Holland

Gordana P. Crnković

A game of hide-and-go-seek delights Dickon (Andrew Knott), Colin (Heydon Prowse), and Mary (Kate Maberly) in *The Secret Garden.*

Agnieszka Holland is known as one of the few women directors working today in Hollywood, and one of the only ones who is not primarily an actress or industry insider. Actually, Holland appears to be as much of an outsider as they come—a woman and a foreigner, her life and career could easily be a subject of a movie of its own.

Born in Poland in 1948, Holland is the daughter of two prominent journalists, a Catholic mother and a Jewish father. Her father died in mysterious circumstances during a political investigation when Agnieszka was only thirteen years old. Though the official account claimed suicide, many believe he was killed, pushed from a window to his death. Holland herself was marked by her Jewishness and split national heritage, her family's political past, and her own indomitable will. She found it impossible to enter film school in Poland during the period of high anti-semitism in the sixties, so she applied to the famous Prague Film Academy where she was one of the 7 accepted among 220 applicants. She studied in Prague during the most interesting period in recent Czechoslovak film history, at the time of the Czechoslovak New Wave of the 1960s which saw the making of such films as *Loves of a Blond* (1965) and *Firemen's Ball* (1967) by young Milos Forman and 1965 and 1967 Academy Award Winners for the best foreign movie, *The Shop on Main Street* by Kadár and Klos and Menzel's *Closely Watched Trains.* Holland

also witnessed the Prague Spring of 1968, and she spent six weeks in prison on account of her support for governmental reforms. After returning to Poland in the seventies, she worked with prominent Polish director Andrzej Wajda, in his "Unit X." Her screenplays were consistently refused by the authorities, but she succeeded in making her first feature films in the last years of the decade, the period of reforms and the rise of the Solidarity movement. Her *Provincial Actors* was released in 1979, *Fever* in 1980, and *A Woman Alone* in 1981. Holland was abroad when the military coup took place in Poland in December 1981. She was told that she could not return to the country, and she was not able to see or contact her nine-year-old daughter Kasia for eight months.

Since 1981, Holland has lived and worked in Germany, France, England and the USA. In Germany she made *Angry Harvest* (1985), an intense psychological and sexual drama about a Polish-Catholic farmer hiding a Jewish woman from the Nazis, with Armin Mueller-Stahl, Elisabeth Trissenaar, Kurt Raab and Irm Hermann, and *Europa, Europa* (1991), the second-top grossing German film of all time in the US. In France she filmed *Olivier, Olivier* (1992) and *To Kill a Priest* (1988). A film based on a true story of a Jewish teen who survives the Holocaust by pretending that he is an Aryan and even becoming a member of the elite Hitler Youth, *Europa, Europa* caught the attention of Michael Barker who handled Orion Classics' sales at the time. He brought the film to the US where it was a huge success because, in his words, Holland is "one of the great film makers in telling a story, unlike so many Europeans who emphasize character. The American public takes to a film where a story is told well." Holland was then invited by Warner Brothers to direct *Secret Garden* (a film based on Frances Hodgson Burnett's 1909 story), which she did in 1994. Her next project was an independent one, a French-English co-production, *Total Eclipse* (1995) with David Thewlis, Leonardo di Caprio and Romane Bohringer, telling the story of the fated love affair between the French nineteenth-century poets, Paul Verlaine and Arthur Rimbaud. Her newest film is *Washington Square,* based on Henry James' novel and featuring Jennifer Jason Leigh and Albert Finney.

The following interview took place in Seattle, Washington, on November 14, 1997.

GORDANA P. CRNKOVIĆ: *Your newest film now playing in theaters is* Washington Square, *based on Henry James' novel and featuring Jennifer Jason Leigh and Albert Finney. What brought you to this project and to the adaptation of this specific novel?*

AGNIESZKA HOLLAND: I read the novel several years ago and did not think of adapting it, did not think it was possible to adapt it, though the story has stayed with me. Then I was contacted by a producer who brought me a script based on the novel, which I found very good. What I loved the most was the development of the main character. I had the ambition for a couple of years to try to make a movie about the change of the human being. Most of my other scripts were much too complicated, the plots were too complicated, too busy with things. Here, because this plot is so simple, you can really concentrate on the depth of this change. When I started to think about the story it became much more original and complicated than I had imagined at the first reading. It had something of a [Polish modernist writer Witold] Gombrowicz touch to it, it is about the identity, about who you are, whether you are what the people expect you to be or how the people see you, if you and your truth is shaped by somebody's expectation or judgment, or if it's possible to find something which is the real you. And in this story there is this young woman who is not very bright or very interesting, but she also has this special kind of an ability to lie to herself and

the others, and then she is doing this change and she is growing and I think it is wonderful. Also, James sounds very modern today. When I read it in the late 1960s I thought it was like Balzac, it speaks about the society which is nineteenth century, capitalistic, it's about money and relationships. And today again everything is about the money. You can adapt him to the modern story without problems. Of course I prefer to do it in the period because it is visually more fascinating, also it gives a bigger freedom.

Are you happy with how the movie turned out?
Yes, I like it, I'm really proud of it.

Did you have the final word with the cut?
Yes, I did, they didn't bother me. There was a moment when the studio saw the movie and didn't know what to think about it. They found it too subtle and they started to speak about the change of the ending, which I liked the most. And it really was too subtle of an ending, it's not the happy ending or something else clear-cut. But they didn't have any ideas. In the old movie version, done by William Wyler, *The Heiress* [1949 with Montgomery Clift, Ralph Richardson and Olivia de Havilland], very famous classic movie which I don't like so much but it's very beloved here, it's the revenge story. By the end she becomes as bitchy as her father and does to the man, her former lover, the same thing that he did to her. I really hated that concept, which is also very unfaithful to James who is much more subtle. Actually, some critics here attacked me for daring to touch this classic.

But you managed to keep your ending?
Yes. It took some energy to do it. I had to make some screenings, to invite some influential people who liked it.

Were the actors the ones you wanted?
Yes, especially the two young ones, and Maggie Smith I had worked with before in *Secret Garden.*

Did you have any problems with interpreting the American classic for the American audience? Did you ever feel insecure about it given the cultural differences and so on?
No. A couple of critics said that it was not so good as *The Heiress* because they love this very American reading of James. But at the same time James is James and I think that in some ways I may understand James better than some American directors. I am a reader and certainly know him better and have a deeper connection to him than many American directors. But it is certainly easier to deal with the classic book. It would be more challenging to take the contemporary material. I did a one-hour adaptation of a Raymond Chandler short story for cable, which is very American, the best of American genre literature and I really enjoyed it a lot when I was a student. It worked very well. But I did a thing which an American director would not do. I made Chandler's main character Philip Marlow, a private detective previously played by famous American actors like Mitchum and Bogart, black. It was very interesting. It also explains many things which are in the novel and which are today not very understandable. Marlow is always beaten by police, is always in love with this rich white client but he cannot fuck her, all these are more understandable if he is black.

What were the differences in how the two Hollywood movies you made, Secret Garden *and* Washington Square, *worked for you, given that* Secret Garden *was your first time meeting with the big studios?*
Secret Garden was worse because the producers were very insecure. It was Coppola but he didn't really have much to do with it, he didn't want to be involved too much; it was a couple of people who worked for him, lovely people but inconsistent. The studio didn't know what to do with this story, they started to get afraid it was too dark or something. There was a lot of pressure during the whole process of post-production and I wasn't so experienced with them and I didn't know how to deal with that. At some point I had the impression that I was lost. But eventually I did what I wanted and the response of the audience was very good, which helped. The response of the audience during the test screening was so good that after it they [the producers] finally pushed me to do some things which I didn't want to do. Like, oh, it's so good, we'll have such a great average of excellence, let's do some little changes, put some more music here and some more flowers there. I did it and now I hate these changes I did at the very last moment. It's not a lot, two or three places, but I feel bad about it. When I showed the movie at the workshop in Cologne where I taught last year, the students noticed immediately where I made those changes without my telling them where they were. They liked the movie very much but pointed out the places where it was "too much."

After Europa, Europa *made a big commercial success in the US, you said that you were surprised with your success here. You said that American cinema works with this concept that the world is not such a complicated place after all, and that your movies are trying to say a different thing, that the world is actually very complicated. Do you still think you are making "com-*

Nadine (Marina Golovine) and Olivier (Gregoire Colin) in the mystery drama *Olivier, Olivier.*

plicated movies," or, in other words, are you trying to go against the stream?
No. I am trying to make my movies and sometimes it happens that it's possible to make it with them [Hollywood]. But the space is very limited. I tried to do two or three contemporary movies here, I developed the scripts with writers, very good writers, but it never happened, it was really too complicated. But this period piece, they think, well maybe she knows better. But it's true that they don't afterwards do the good work with distribution which is a pity, but at least it works on this basic level. I thought about making one commercial movie here, just to try it, but so far I was not lucky, I didn't find something. I liked one script, and the studio (Fox) had the flirtation with the idea that I could do it. Afterwards they got afraid and gave it to a big commercial director. Now I have the proposal for a romantic story from Africa, something like *Out of Africa,* they are asking me if I can do it.

You said you were working on a couple of new projects which are in different stages. What are these about and are you still keeping your options open in Europe?
You have to do several projects at the same time, though I hate this system, I think I will stop doing it. But then you can work on a project for a year or two years and then it falls apart, and then you have nothing and have to start from scratch. It's necessary to do it this way if you want to have a movie out every two years, which is my average. I wrote a script which I will probably do next, and which is a kind of European movie, even though I set a big part of the action in Canada. But part takes place in Poland and in Russia, and the whole thing is more in the direction of *Olivier, Olivier.* I try to alternate and do one independent film and one with the studio.

How do you think the things that you went through—dealing with repressive regimes, refusal of the screenplays in Poland for quite a while, not being able to be in touch with your daughter after the military coup and so on—how did they affect you personally and artistically?
I don't know, I don't do the psychoanalysis. But I think it's certainly good for my work to have some extreme life experiences. I think that what filmmakers of the younger generation lack today is life experience; they mostly come from pretty wealthy bourgeois families, they are going straight to film schools, they are watching movies in cinemas and mostly on videotapes and that's it. And you can see it. Of course, if you are a genius like Marcel Proust you can spend the whole life in bed and still have incredible depth of experience. But most of the film directors are not geniuses of this kind. It helps in directing, when you know what suffering, separation, fear mean. It helps you to help actors give something from themselves. And it gives me strength as a human being, maybe it makes me more fighter-like. But at the same time it uses you.

Catherine Sloper (Jennifer Jason Leigh) is a wealthy young woman courted by dashing, but penniless, Morris Townsend (Ben Chaplin) in *Washington Square.*

You never got depressed about some things that happened to you?
I did, but I wasn't depressed because of the people at the top. When I really got depressed, for example, was in Poland in the 1970s, at the time when I was treated worse than my friends because of my political and personal situation, and when some of my friends were sometimes too weak to show solidarity with me. I was depressed when it happened from close friends, that they were unable to show the kind of demonstration . . . But sometimes they did do it.

People know a lot about censorship under communism. But what about the ideological rigidity in the West? There were attacks in France with regard to your movie Europa, Europa, *because there the main character is a Jewish boy who survives by pretending that he is Aryan and even becomes a member of Hitler Youth. You were also attacked there for* Korczak, *Wajda's movie for which you had written the screenplay, because of the final scene of that movie. On the other hand, you received prizes from American Jewish associations . . .*
The problem of France is this terrible denial, after the war, of the guilt they had during the war, being the collaborationist nation, the organized French state sending the Jews to the concentration camps by French police and gendarmes. It's a terrible experience. This denial grows in very irrational ways. French Jews deny it also because they feel very connected to France, it's like Dreyfus was. In some ways he is very typical, he was a heroic military man, it was terrible that they just rejected him. The Jews there want to forget what happened there in World War II, they don't want to admit it emotionally, even though they admit it rationally, the historical facts. They transferred in some way the aggression and frustration to the Poles, who have their own register of the guilt. But it's not the French problem, this Polish anti-semitism, it's between Poles and Jews. Wajda did a movie, *Promised Land,* which was also accused of anti-Semitism. It was a wonderful, most energetic film, which shows the Jews in a not very flattering way, but it also shows Poles in a not very flattering way, it's about the beginning of capitalism in Lodz, very interesting film. But he also maybe doesn't feel what the Jewish sensitivity means—many Poles don't, my friend Kieslowski didn't either—you have to be very careful dealing with that, they don't know how to deal with that. Maybe in some ways it was not a politically correct movie. But Wajda is certainly not anti-semitic, I know it, I am Jewish myself and can judge it. He was strongly attacked for this movie in France and in the US. But he keeps doing movies about that, it's his own obsession, the guilt. The attacks on *Korczak* also show a kind of transferral of guilt from Germany to Poland. What bad things can you tell about the Poles in World War II? It wasn't them who did the concentration camps and ghettos, it wasn't them who killed the Jews. But in some ways, because Germany is important and culturally and economically a very strong country, and Poland is a kind of a no-man's land, they transfer the aggression against Germany on Poles, and when you speak to a lot of Jews about the war today, they speak in the way like it was the Poles who did that. What was incredible and showed the lack of intellectual honesty in the French press, the journalist who wrote the critique of *Korczak,* which started this whole thing, she told that Wajda lies about history and tries

to whitewash the Polish people because he doesn't tell that Poles created the ghettos. Come on! And afterwards there were a couple of letters from very important Jewish people, members of the underground during the war, telling that it is not true. These letters were never published. I don't trust these people, you can't just fool with the history in this way.

Did you feel that the audience in France had the same opinion as these critics?
No. It was four people altogether, among them Lanzmann who did *Shoah* and thinks that he is the owner of *Shoah.* I have great respect for his movie, I think it's a fantastic documentary, but he as a person is awful. Yes, it was only a couple of people, but they are noisy people. The French critics circle is very small, you have some opinion makers and they tell it, and afterwards it blew. It can destroy you in some way, it's very dangerous. If it happens, it can destroy the movie. With *Europa, Europa* it was not like that, it was only Lanzmann who wrote something like that, but with *Korczak* it was the mass attack. Audience no, they are intelligent audience there, except that they are following the trends with the movies of this kind, art movies, you need to have the support of some of these media.

Why did Germany refuse to submit Europa, Europa *for an Oscar nomination?*
It was jealousy and fury, though they did submit *Angry Harvest,* which was done by the same producer and myself. They hate this producer who did that and *Europa, Europa,* which I can understand because he is really a very hateful person. Some of them were nationalistic too, though they have it very deeply and hide it from themselves—not all of them are like that, but some part of these people have very strong feelings like that. That year it was pretty sure that *Europa, Europa* would win. I think that for them the concept that me and especially this producer's film would win the Oscar was just too much, they were so angry about it. They preferred not to submit anything, they said there was not a movie in Germany good enough to be submitted, which was a stupid thing to do. The people from the industry, directors and so on, were furious about it, too. It showed Germany in a very stupid light. It would have been good for the German movie to have had a nominee, who cares who did it, it's a German movie which is winning an important prize and it's good publicity.

I read somewhere that the producer of your other German movie, Angry Harvest, *tried to intervene a lot in your work, choice of actors and other things. How did that work?*
Well, the producer of that movie was this old, extremely energetic Jewish person who is very rich and at the same time has incredible energy and passion, like these guys from the studios from the thirties or forties. He tried to put his finger in everything but I was strong enough to do things my way.

Did you want Armin Mueller-Stahl and Elisabeth Trissenaar as the main actors in that movie?
Absolutely. But the producer did something very stupid which made Elisabeth so nervous that I had the big problem to make her feel secure for the first week. He decided that she had a bad body and that he wants to have the double for the tits. He's that kind of guy, very kitschy. So when she knew about it she got terribly nervous. It was the movie I shot in three weeks so this was really a problem.

Could you compare your work in different countries, Poland, Germany, France, US? Is there a country where you prefer working?
Poland was the best because of the strong feeling of community, but that was the Poland of the 1970s, I don't know what the situation is there now. The only inconvenient thing there was the lack of money, the equipment was very primitive and old-fashioned, it was impossible to make some kinds of camera movements and so on. Also, some part of the crew was always drunk. But other than that it was a very joyful experience. I also never had an authority problem there on account of my being very young when I started and a woman. All my collaborators were very respectful and devoted workers. But at the same time we had a lot of discussions together, and I was allowed to show my doubts. When I behaved the same way in France while making *To Kill a Priest,* the crew did not accept it at all. They thought that it showed weakness if I asked myself if something was good or said "wait a moment, I have to think because it's not good." I had a fancy crew for that movie, one of the best there, people who always work with Americans, very snobbish. Then I understood I had to play a director with them. It was a bit similar with *Olivier, Olivier,* and finally with *Total Eclipse* I found a French crew which responded to what I did. It was really great. It means it depends on the people, but certainly the French are sometimes more snobbish and superficial. Germany was O.K. but heavy-minded, but it was also because this producer didn't always use the best people. England was lovely but slow, heavy and slow. Actually, the American crew is the best, and also they allowed me to use some of the Polish people on the crew. Production designer, costume designer, music, cinematography. My daughter

Kasia worked with me also, that was very important. There were six Poles in key positions and everybody accepted it, which is impossible in Western Europe. In Western Europe I brought one person with me and they were already nervous, they are more xenophobic and afraid of the kind of people they would not understand, much less open. Here people are judged by their professionalism, good or bad, it does not matter where they are from, which is nice. Also the crew here is very enthusiastic, making movies here is very important, the industry is an important industry and the people who have the chance to work in the movies want to give everything. In England the technical crew is very professional, very nice, but they almost never go to watch the movie they are making. It's a kind of alienated work which has nothing to do with the result.

How about being a woman director here and in other places?
I did not have big problems with that except twice when I had people in my crew who had problems with accepting the fact that a woman is a boss. It was their problem, you could not do anything about it. I would not generalize it, it's the specific cases. In America there are fewer women directors than in France and Germany where there are many of them. But I didn't have any problems here. Also, when I did my first movie here I was already an established director, so a lot of people in the industry were respectful of my work and were glad to work with me. I don't know what happens if someone comes from nowhere and is a woman, it's certainly not so easy. Some of my women director friends have suffered a lot here, in the discussions and so on. It never was a problem for me. I had other problems, political problems because I was a Jew in Poland, because of censorship, then after I moved because I am from Poland in France, and other problems in other places.

What is your opinion about some other Eastern European directors who came to the West and have worked here, specifically Forman and Polanski? Forman was in Prague when you studied there.
Yes, Forman was already an established director there. During my first year there he did *The Firemen's Ball* in 1967, and before that he already had done *Loves of a Blonde* and *Black Peter.*

What do you think of the changes these directors' works undergo when they move to the West?
Well, it's different for Forman and Polanski. I think that Polanski was born an American director. It's a pity he was thrown away from America because he's not that happy, I think, artistically, in France. His temper is so different from the French; he's very respected there but he never did a good movie there. The cinema here has changed and he lost touch with it. He is trying to do American movies in Paris. But if it wasn't for that unhappy circumstance from his biography, I think that he was very happy as an American director. *Chinatown, Rosemary's Baby* were brilliant movies, though I like the most his English movies, *Repulsion* and *Cul de Sac,* also *The Fearless Vampire Killers.*

Do you like his new movies, Bitter Moon *and* Death and the Maiden?
Not very much. I think *Death and the Maiden* is well made, but I don't like the play.

How about Forman? What did you think of his newest movie, The People vs. Larry Flynt?
I liked it but I didn't love it. Forman is a different case. He was so original in his Czech movies that it was difficult to match it afterwards, but he did a couple of fantastic American movies which also had the advantage of being accessible to a very wide audience at the same time. But you always pay the price in some way.

Do you ever compare yourself in any way to these Eastern European directors in the West, or learn something from them, try to see what they did what you would or would not do?
I understood Forman who, after the commercial and critical disaster of *Taking Off,* his first American movie, thought "I will never know this society well enough to do something which is not based on a best-seller." It means that he needs this inter-media. In some ways I understand it. It's true that I will never feel so free in the description of this society, of these subjects, as I felt doing *Provincial Actors* or *A Woman Alone,* when I really knew everything about it. But the problem is that today I don't know everything about Poland either, which means that in some ways I have to create my own reality which is more artificial. It's less rooted in the everyday reality, feeling of the place. The same happened to Kieslowski when he made the *Trilogy.* His first Polish movies had this incredible sense of the social detail, the last ones in France were much more conceptual.

Andrzej Wajda, with whom you worked a lot in the 1970s in Poland, did his 1991 film Korczak *based on your screen-play. Do you have some projects with Wajda going on now?*
I promised that I would help him with one script if he asked me. But it will be difficult. I was full of energy at the time and it was easy for me to share, especially with somebody like Wajda whom I love and respect so

much. But today to keep enough energy to keep going with my own work is already not so easy. It would be difficult for me to spend a couple of months to write for somebody else.

You helped Wajda write a screenplay for his famous 1976 Man of Marble. *Is the main character in the movie, a young film director called Agnieszka, portrayed after you?*
No, she is not. I helped with the last version of the screen-play. The first version, which they were not able to do for a long time for political reasons, was written thirteen years before, when I was a child. Afterwards Wajda knew me and I became his pupil and friend and I think he told Janda [the lead actress] to watch me as they were shooting the movie. But I don't think I acted like that.

How would you describe the new situation in post-communist, post-1989 Polish cinema?
I haven't seen a lot of Polish new films, but a couple of years ago I was a president of the jury at the festival of Polish movies, I saw all thirty or so movies made that year. Mostly it's not very good. The transition is very difficult, both psychologically and in the terms of satisfying the audience. Poland had a great audience, not only for the political movies but also for the ambitious and difficult art movies like *Rashomon* or *Woman in the Dunes,* which would have some hundred thousand people watching, something which is today considered amazing. Also Bergman, Fellini, all these classics, who were not classics at the time, would have this great audience, as well as things from American cinema like *Midnight Cowboy* and so on. The more obscure movies had maybe not so big an audience but also a considerable one. After the fall of communism, they did something very stupid. They gave distribution to the people who run the movie theaters, and they opened it completely only for the American movies. So for four years you had only American movies. This situation cut the communication between the filmmakers and the audience, which is very difficult to establish again. Movies started to be bad because they were made for nobody. Some of these movies also tried to compete with the American movies, and some others did something very obscure and unwatchable. But now, this year, there were a couple of Polish movies very successful with the audience, for instance Jerzy Stuhr's *Stories of Love.* I watched it with real joy, it's a lovely, lovely movie, and it worked very well with the audience. I think the return of good cinema will come, cinema has very deep roots in Poland, there were so many good filmmakers in Poland after the war, I don't think it can completely disappear. Also it is good that they kept the production running, which means the structure is there, the people and so on. And they are not drinking any more, the crew is very sober. It's the film market, they worry about unemployment and are not paid by the state any more.

What is the nature of the collaboration between your daughter Kasia and yourself?
Kasia has a specific profession; she graduated from the Art School in Brussels in the special Comics Department. So, making of comic books. At the same time, because of me and her father, all of the family being filmmakers, she was very much involved with the filmmaking process and she is very smart about it. And at some point she started doing story boards; she does not do only what I or another director ask her to do but she has a lot of ideas about the visual storytelling, editing and so on. She started working with me, but now she is working with many other directors. And she is really good.

Somewhere I read about your speaking a lot about the identity confusion which you experience, but I haven't sensed any of that in our conversation. What is this confusion about?
I talk about the identity in the wider, more existential sense, about the way people can connect to themselves. It's also the feeling of being a part of a community. Being half Polish and half Jewish makes you very confused and schizophrenic, also emigration opens up questions about who you really are. Is it more important to be Polish or to be a woman or to be Agnieszka or to be a mother or anything else? The main question interesting to me is how much we are created by expectations of people, how people want to see us or to push us. In our decisions, opinions, emotions even, how much are we ourselves and how much are we influenced by circumstances?

Do you see yourself influenced by circumstances more than you want to be?
Practically all the time. That is my obsession, I am constantly fighting. If I feel that there is something which shapes me instead of myself, I try to destroy it, which is probably not a very healthy reaction. But certainly it's my obsession to be free in some way.

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Buñuel's Net Work

Performative Doubles in the Impossible Narrative of *The Phantom of Liberty*

James Tobias

Introduction: the Impossible Narrative of *The Phantom of Liberty*

The Phantom of Liberty (1974), cited by Luis Buñuel as one of his favorite films and his "most surrealist" work begins with a historical reference to the Napoleonic Wars, and proceeds to careen through a number of episodes which, although each is linked to those that precede and follow it, remain partial and fragmented.[1] We encounter dozens of characters through a well-designed but seemingly random narrative that introduces characters who seem both puzzled and puzzling, only to escape from the situation in which these characters find themselves and move on to a new one. In total, the experience we have depends more on impossibility than verisimilitude, and that quality has helped to inspire a range of divergent responses to the work. In an early review, Marsha Kinder notes the circularity brought about by the film's conclusion,[2] while in a later critical study Susan Suleiman considers the continually displaced narrative as radically linear.[3] Suleiman also considers Kinder's positing of a thematics of the "tyranny of convention" to be "too tragic."[4] Still later, Linda Williams finds the film a surrealist statement on the oppositional structuring of law and desire, but considers Suleiman's reading overly formalistic, while disallowing Kinder's reading of the film as a moral statement by Buñuel. Moral statements shouldn't be interpreted in such a strategic surrealist art.[5] The most fascinating aspect of all of these readings, though, is what they reveal about the film: they are all apt, although each author may successively disagree with or contradict the preceding critical review. In fact, the succession of contradictions which these readings of the film offer echoes the succession of contradictory episodes in the film itself.

It's possible to frame the work in such a way as to make all of these responses coherent readings of the film. I will argue that *The Phantom of Liberty* works by presenting a series of episodes which we can regard not as linear narratives cut short but as potential narrative networks which, although only partially activated for our experience, can continue to operate and influence each other. Each episode presupposes the existence of a set of real world power networks. The narrative networks in which the characters make their moves in the film resemble these real world networks, so we understand that the film is realistic to the degree that we recognize reality.

Jean-Claude Brialy and Monica Vitti in Buñuel's *Le Fantôme de la Liberté.*

How can material that is networked be narrative? Roland Barthes made one of the clearest attempts to place the figure of the network at the service of interpretation. In *S/Z,* Barthes applies five codes of denotation and connotation which, he says, all lexia fall into. The voices of a text are woven as these codes are networked to produce pluralities of meaning in a definitely segmentable literary topos which produces texts that are imperfectly reversible.[6] Rather than put the figure of the network at the service of interpretation, I'm more interested in how the network figure has been used in a variety of discourses that evolved concurrently with Buñuel's work; *S/Z* is a crucial example of such a use. On the one hand Barthes' use of the network figure relies on a propositional segmentation of verbal elements which is more appropriate for the construction of verbal subjectivities as opposed to cinematic ones, and on the other, his usage of networks doesn't provide much leverage in terms of understanding the actions of the cinema as a network that produces massive bodies of spectators. *Phantom* calls for an analysis which can handle texts which are not definitely segmentable, and which might have sections which demand reading backwards as well. Most importantly, from his earliest films, Buñuel has always been aware of both the specificity of the cinema and the power structures that it deploys to produce imagining subjects. His films in general and *Phantom* in particular demand a fuller accounting than *S/Z* provides. How has the network figure come to be used across domains?

From originally referring to communication links established over a geographical space as in a broadcast network, "network" as a structuring motif has taken over from "circuit" for much of our thinking about complex elements of a biological nature, allowing us to speak of "neurotransmitters," "receptors," "input" and "output." "Thought" and "soul" can be placed in a neural chain of command somewhere farther down the line than "retina" or "visual cortex."[7] With the rise of cybernetic telecommunications, network has also come to mean the elements and links that carry data within and between computers,[8] leading to the use of the figure as a processing paradigm wherein networks function in a description of the knowledge and actions that produce, for example, intelligible speech.[9] The connectionists of the 1980s built "massively parallel" computers that would enable "intelligent machines," and modeled schemes for the acquisition, storage, and processing of data as operations upon items existing in networks, this time configured after a neurological model.[10]

Marvin Minsky's polemic, *Society of Mind,* combines social, technical, and neurological senses of the network figure to argue that our brains are societies of elements assisting each other in a technical collaboration that results in effects that we call emotion and intelligence.[11]

"Network" can thus describe any structure that includes elements which communicate to each other in one sense or another. What constitutes an element and what constitutes a link become defining qualities with great implications. With the garrulous networks whose cumulative effect is intelligence in a "society of mind," Minsky proposes an understanding of "the strangest mysteries of mind." Minsky reproduces his concept of networked agents by making each page in the book an independent section which links to the others, and which are organized into sections which handle a specific function: memory, emotion, and so forth. Each page in the book itself is an element in a potential network of rationality which waits for the user to read, activate links, and begin to bring the network into being. On a macrolevel, the book reprises the work of the networked agents he describes as the builders of consciousness. It sets out an agenda for a cognitivist enterprise that will finally build mind out of brain by positing "agents" that communicate with each other in different sorts of groups acting hierarchically to perceive the world, make it into sense, and move the body into action. "Agents" are the "particles" that theories of artificial intelligence need to become robust and productive. And at the level of the book, the reader becomes an agent which can help Minsky to implement his society of mind.

In Minsky, the network figure becomes internal to a machine in the same way as it is internal to a human, human intelligence turns out to be that of a "wonderful machine," and the mind falls into line as the rational (and rationalized) output of a neurological brain. Mind is explained by this cognitive networking in the same way as biology has successfully explained "life."[12] In the bargain, we have a model for our social world as well. Minsky understands liberty, that is, "freedom of will," to be an imaginary construction, a *phantom,* if you will, that is necessary for sanity and social order:

> Consider how our social lives depend upon the notion of *responsibility* and how little that idea would mean without our belief that personal actions are voluntary. Without that belief, no praise or shame could accrue to actions that were caused by Cause, nor could we assign any credit or blame to deeds that came about by Chance. What could we make our children learn if neither they nor we perceived some fault or virtue anywhere? We also use the idea of freedom of will to justify our judgments about good and evil. . . . But if we suspected that such choices were not made freely, but by the interference of some hidden agency, we might very well resent that interference. Then we might become impelled to wreck the precious value-schemes that underlie our personalities or become depressed about the futility of a predestination tempered only by uncertainty. Such thoughts must be suppressed.[13]

I quote this passage at length in order for the implications of network, knowledge, element, and link to become clear and their relation to power become unmistakable. Minsky posits the mechanical as but a well understood version of the human, and designs a cognitive science that finds networked agents internal to the brain, a science that will explain the mind just as other sciences—physics, biology, chemistry—have explained the external world. In this virtual world in Minsky's mind's eye (which he proposes as a program for the world of industry and research that will take many years to implement), communicating agents are unique but can possess multiple links and be hierarchicized in complex ways, while free will is a ghost of an idea that is necessary to motivate children to learn and virtuous citizens to refrain from evil. To question freedom of will in the name of self-knowledge is to risk the loss of "cheerfulness!" Not much to give up, in fact, if you are an agitating filmmaker out for a hearty laugh in a less than perfect world where mystery is more of a criterion for hope than is mechanization.

The networks that Michel Foucault describes in *The History of Sexuality* are all power-oriented. Foucault's networks make no apology for wanting to be intelligent but not being able to manage the task. For Foucault, power operates in networks of "institutional devices" and "discursive strategies." For example, sexuality is produced in these networks. Repression does not reduce or confine sexuality but helps to multiply it in new forms:

> Speaking about children's sex, inducing educators, physicians, administrators, and parents to speak of it, or speaking to them about it, causing children themselves to talk about it, and enclosing them in a web of discourses which sometimes address them, sometimes speak about them, or impose canonical bits

> of knowledge on them, or use them as a basis for constructing a science that is beyond their grasp—all this together enables us to link an intensification of the interventions of power to a multiplication of discourse.[14]

Power-oriented networks might deploy or utilize the sorts of resource-oriented networks described above, as well as institutions such as schools, hospitals, psychiatrists' offices, or confession cabinets. But Foucault's networks of power cannot be reduced to networks of resources, and operate fundamentally differently. An element in a power network may have more than one name, and delivery of knowledge as an effect of power is never guaranteed and not always predictable. Foucault finds power at work in the family producing "multiple, fragmentary, and mobile sexualities."[15] Sex can be transformed from what we might think of as a "link" between singular and "elemental" bodies[16] into "that which had to be confessed": power gives many names to sex, and the difference between element and link begins to blur. It is for this reason that Foucault goes to great lengths to define how power operates, what its effects are, and thus how it can be discerned in action.

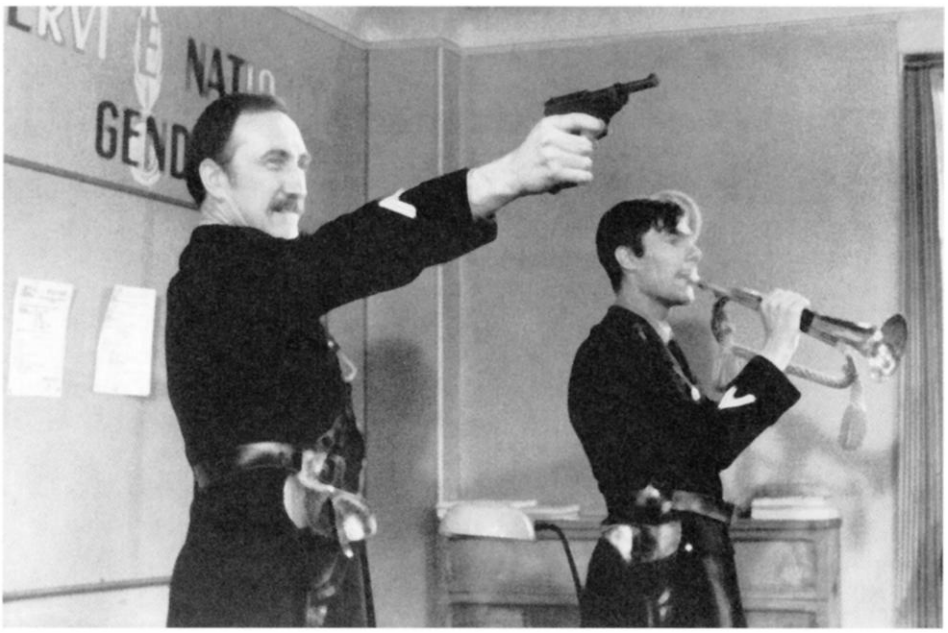
Buñuel, on the other hand, structures narrative in *The Phantom of Liberty* in a network of effects. The effect-oriented network works as a depiction of a power network; as in a power network, elements are no longer unique and links are no longer distinct from elements. But Buñuel shows that when it is only the reading of the work that makes power real, networks of power can be represented in disconcerting ways that call into question the presumed coherence of those networks' operations. Networks of effects can have links that are disjunctive as well as conjunctive; reversal, juxtaposition, doubling, opposition and other operations work as well as input and output in producing knowledge. Resource networks, then, operate in terms of input and output between linked elements to fabricate and supply knowledge. Power networks multiply elemental identities to produce truth. Effect networks link multiplied elements through disjunctive operations to question the truth of knowledge. Minsky's book is a network of effects that aims at convincing the reader of his program for the mechanization of consciousness in resource networks; Foucault's book is a network of effects for identifying and understanding power networks; Buñuel's film is a network of effects for causing a power failure.

The narrative network is the primary mode of cinematic operation in *The Phantom of Liberty.* Particular characters involved in particular configurations representing real world power networks constitute narrative networks which Buñuel introduces successively throughout the film, but which he quickly leaves *in potentio* as one set of elements and links leads to the next. The character's moves in these narrative networks prove fragmentary and contradictory, revealing the fragmentary and contradictory nature of the power networks which Buñuel is setting up as extra-textual referents. And our own engagement with each character, each network, also is limited to a fragmented and contradictory experience, as the story moves through many narrative networks just as a data packet moves through a digital network.

Buñuel's presentation of these narrative networks makes use of a critical notion of power networks which define and even produce individuals at the site of the reception of the messages that these networks carry. Much of Buñuel's filmic work on power not only historically precedes that of Foucault, but provides a cinematic precedent. We can best understand *The Phantom of Liberty* as a special effect made visible where narrative technologies produce knowing viewers in the power network that cinema is. In this film, one particular path out of many potential paths is taken across narrative networks that Buñuel screens as a critic of the political and social structures that continue to rule the twentieth century. In a world where we imagine networks of power articulating possibilities of identification and movement, Buñuel constructs a personal vision of those networks of power in order to expose them as such.

A family network may be represented by the characters, their relationships to each other, and the situation within which they are found. But the family narrative may be surprised to find that the family network structure that it seems to depend on is somehow dramatically or comically hinged on the narrative movement of a character belonging to a different network, the maid, for example, whose relation to the family is one of class and labor. These links are enabled and can become critical, since characters having roles in different networks can lead to multiple networks which depend on one character. Buñuel, in a manner similar to Foucault in his analyses of power, intertwines functional structure and motivating content, ultimately portraying power as utilizing both but pretending to require neither. A shift in one may produce a shift in the other.

In this way, what I call the "impossible narrative" becomes a requirement, if one is to even pose the question of portraying power in film fiction. Without



A police chief takes aim against invisible menaces.

apparent contradiction, the necessary yet invisible relations of power to power will not become visible, and so cannot become cinematic. In *The Phantom of Liberty,* each time Buñuel shows one networked structure hinged to another in a narrative movement, he does so with a twist which in the same moment makes it clear both that the structure is apparently the double of a real world power structure external to the narrative, and that the external structure that he is referring to is, in some sense, twisted. Because the narrative network performatively doubles real world structures of power through dramatic operations and thus is not simply a sign referring to power, undoing the double effectively becomes the imaginary undoing of the original. Still, the double can only resemble the original to the degree that you share Buñuel's cultural background or can read his frames. The undoing of the double, ultimately, is your job. Buñuel's job is to make your work a pleasure. You become involved in what may be termed a syndicalism of narrative work, but in Buñuel's anarcho-syndicalist vision, you labor to produce *The Phantom of Liberty.*

A critical work as well as a narrative plaything, *The Phantom of Liberty* projects the viewer as a willing participant in the elaboration of power, but at the same time as it puts the viewer in the spotlight, it offers the chance of escape back into the dark, irreducible mysteries beyond power's blaze. In a vivid example of the fact that a work that seems narrative may not only elucidate a critique of power but work to devoid power of itself, *The Phantom of Liberty* requires a disjunctive reading of power networks both interior and exterior to cinema; Buñuel's spectator is created recognizing those power networks which not only produce cinema but which cinematic narrative reproduces. As viewing actions, the contradictions through which *The Phantom of Liberty* is structured make those networks discernible, and allow the viewer produced at their articulation to take pleasure at their expense.

The film shimmers with ambiguity. We are left with many possibilities for rendering the film coherent as we trip down the primrose path where *The Phantom of Liberty* leads us. Not the least of these possibilities is that in an originary experience of the film, we viewers are only a phantom of Buñuel's imagination. This possibility becomes conceivable to us, yet patently impossible. Of course we exist, but how can we otherwise explain our experience of the hermetic nature of Buñuel's passionate meaning-making? After all, somehow we are making some sense of this nonsense. Contrariwise, we can also imagine that Buñuel has only produced this work to satisfy the actions which we will take upon it. In this reading, he becomes the phantom, and if we imagine him at all, we imagine him only as an originary excuse which relieves us of taking full responsibility for the implications that the film sets forth. And yet, the film's contradictions demand a response: what of our phantom, liberty? Buñuel's "net work" posits both a creative, historically existing author, and a creative viewing subject, each of whom exist at cross-purposes to each other in a work which is not entirely reducible in terms of either figure's perspective.

Looking at *The Phantom of Liberty*

In order to characterize the networks Buñuel is lacing together, we need to look closely at the film. We enter *The Phantom of Liberty* through a painting: *The Executioners of May 3, 1808.* The painting is by Goya, to whose thematics many have compared Buñuel's. It depicts the execution of Spanish resistance fighters by Napoleonic invaders bringing French empire to Spain in the name of the professedly enlightened values of the French revolution. After suggesting we are entering into a painter's retelling of a historical moment almost two hundred years old, the film moves into scenes of execution, with Spaniards shouting "Vivan las ca'enas!" or "Long live our chains!"[17] before dying. The resistance fighters choose autonomy as a monarchist state over the liberty offered by the French, at the cost of death.

But no sooner do we believe we are seeing a film referencing an important work of art which itself visualizes a defining moment in Spanish history than we are informed by a vivid red title that the film is based on the novel by Gustavo Becquer, whose text inspired Goya's painting. And in fact, the film never re-poses actors in a literal re-staging of the Goya work, but uses it to contextualize a new version of a historical novel. Shortly we find that this new literary context is also a pretext. The film now no longer seems to be retelling the story of the Goya, as we move on to the story of a French captain who falls in love with the funerary statue of a beautiful woman. Framed in profile, the captain caresses her stony loveliness, but the frame suddenly shifts to a wider view where we see, unexpectedly, the statue of the woman's father, a knight, lift his arm and smite him. For the moment, the family head has protected the honor of the young woman; the virgin saint is intact, and the foreigner repulsed. A woman's voice begins a voice-over narration of the scene as the captain opens the tomb of a woman who turns out to be a saint, miraculously preserved.

Though the film settles in a narrated version of Becquer's historical novella, the voiceover is halting, unprofessional. In fact, it is rather squeaky, and as she tells the story, she doesn't seem to read well. Just as we are wondering what kind of historical narration this could possibly be, the woman comes to the word "paraphernalia" and cannot pronounce it. As our narrator struggles over the difficult word, the Romantic scene of the open casket slips to a view of two women, maids, sitting on a modern park bench. Our narrator has been reading aloud. Her companion, knitting beside her, must explain what "paraphernalia" means.

If her question arises from a scene of death and violation, the answer comes from critical comparison. The knitter calmly explains that "paraphernalia" has most often meant the dowry of a woman to be married, but in England, it refers to all of the household objects, even the sewing kits. This tranquil knitter, twin of the lace-maker often found in Buñuel's films, seems even more omniscient than our narrating maid. She gives us a key to the film: in summing up the meaning of the word, she is summing up the materials and the strategies of the film: this film, above all, is the knitting together of paraphernalia. Paraphernalia is culturally based, gendered, subject to historical forces and operations of power. And yet, in her breadth of knowledge, she indicates that meanings are multiple and contingent, and culturally translatable, within limits. Just as she knits wool and meaning at the same time, the film has been knitting visual references, literary references, and historical figures. Just as she is binding up her production of meaning in a lacy network, so, might we think, is Buñuel. And should we protest such an immediate evocation of an enunciating author in the form of a speaking figure bestowing meaning on a confused reading of a text, we might also consider that Buñuel has already disguised himself to appear as one of the fallen Spaniards whom we have left for dead in the distant past.[18] As the first episode melts into the second, the film presents us with a questioning as to the effects of cinematic narrative gaining pre-eminence over competing arts such as literature and epic painting in the representation of our nations, our passions, and our cultural meanings. Then, in the slip of a mispronounced word by a faltering narrator, we are moved into a problematic of authorial enunciation and receptive sense-making. Which counts more: the hesitating speech of the narrating maid or the omniscient explanation of the listener knitting away beside her?

Back in the park, the maid's ward, Veronique Foucauld, and her girlfriends are approached by a sinister man. We instantly suspect him of being a child molester, so cautiously yet insidiously does he watch and then approach the children. He shows them what we believe are pornographic postcards, which he gives to Veronique, who rejoins the maid to bicycle home. The narrative trots along with them. Madame Foucauld, scandalized by the postcards her daughter delivers, consults with her stressed husband. Disgusted, then aroused, Mr. Foucauld recalls the couple's romantic vacations as they thumb through the pictures, never quite mentioning any explicit detail. Madame hushes him, upset

that Veronique may overhear their suggestive reminiscing, but the idea of being overheard by the child only contributes to her heightening excitement. She kisses him madly. As their ardor cools, we see the contents of their photographic aphrodisiac: well-known tourist monuments, which now again appear, in their eyes, revolting. He rips one to pieces: the curvaceous domes of Sacre Coeur simply "go too far."

The maid must be fired for allowing Veronique to receive these dirty pictures, while the pictures, now spent, are returned to the girl so she may trade them for pictures of insects. Family networks, networks of class and status, and networks of nationhood are all invoked and interlinked, and skewed just enough to become contiguous. Each structure is called up through a narrative that begins to happen, only to shift into a different one. The way these networks are invoked is far from realistic. Each one appears through a series of operations that question its coherence and independence. Buñuel has begun a movement through a set of narrative networks which seem to resemble the real world power networks we know, but which differ in revealing ways.

In an important sequence that follows, we see an insomniac Mr. Foucauld set his alarm as he notes the time. He turns out the light, and the camera pans to his wife. The camera pans back, and after a few moments, he turns the light back on, and sits up to get a drink of water. He is astonished to find that hours have passed. Has he been asleep? Or is he still asleep? Might this be a dream of his wife? After we watch Mr. Foucauld watch a nocturnal parade of visitors comprising a chicken, a secret agent, a postman who delivers a letter, and an emu, all within moments of film time but apparently taking hours according to the chiming of the clock in the story, we hear a voice which says, "That's sufficient," and we find ourselves in a doctor's examining room. The husband has not actually been dreaming or having strange visitors, but retelling the strange visions of the night before. For Mr. Foucauld, the experience is strange but real, for the doctor it must be a dream, while for us it is a diegetic device that moves the narrating forward, a narrated retelling that intensifies Mr. Foucauld's anxiety, and a cinematic distraction in its own right. A reconciliation between these points of view seems impossible. To prove the experience actually happened, he hands the doctor the letter he received, which seems to prove something, but what?

A nurse comes in to solve the problem. Leading the camera and the doctor into the next room, she hands the doctor yet another letter, detailing the precarious health of her aging father. She wants to take a few days off to visit him. The doctor takes this letter for the real thing, grants her request, and returns to his distraught patient. The nurse's solution is simple: the camera finds her driving through pounding rain, as the narrative branches yet again to follow her into another set of networks.

Critical Configurations

Accounting for the sudden shifts and radical openness of this film has typically been understood by configuring the elements of the film as linear episodes which progress through syntagmatic elaboration or metonymic shift. Susan Suleiman's article, "Freedom and Necessity: Narrative Structure in the *Phantom of Liberty*," allows us to understand the limits of a "linear" reading of the film, and what a "networked" reading offers. Suleiman divides the film into 12 narrative sequences.[19] "Constructing the sequences is a way of arriving at the linear-logical progression of a narrative."[20] For Suleiman, there must be a specific point in which one episode ends, and another begins.[21] She delineates episodes by locating a "Subject" in each one; a new subject indicates a new episode. Thus, episode leads to episode, as sentence leads to sentence. Since the film avoids closure in any one episode by moving into a different story, *The Phantom of Liberty* subverts narrative codes by obeying them in such a way that no coherent story can emerge. The film is a maximally free narrative still obeying narrative form; Buñuel is expressing the freedom "not to make sense."[22] But two aspects of segmentation work against the film's construction.

On the one hand, a set of scenes may have more than one subject; on the other, they may belong to more than one "episode." Are the strange events that follow the camera's move away from Madame Foucauld's sleeping face definitely events that happen in a diegetic reality focussing on her husband, whom Suleiman names this episode's Subject? The cinematic language is ambiguous enough here to make us wonder whose dream this is, especially if we remember the dream-within-a-dream weave of *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* (1972) that makes that film so puzzlingly rich. Part of the key to understanding the ambiguity here is in understanding the potential for reading film sequences both forward and backward. Robert Eberwein identifies two modes, a forward and a "retroactive" mode of dream narrative.[23] Certain scenes may be motivated in forward mode: Mr. Foucauld goes to

Ann-Marie Deschott is involved with erotic games in Buñuel's film.

bed and has strange visions. They may also be motivated in a retroactive mode: the night visitors appear not as an actual happening or dream but as a retelling which occurs in the doctor's office. Segmenting from both directions, we get two readings of a set of scenes, and the episodic nature of those scenes becomes indeterminate in terms of where each begins and ends.

Ultimately, narrative flow becomes indeterminate and partial, yet not incoherent. The fluid transitions of this film allow a bidirectional reading to be taken to the extreme. One far-fetched possibility would be to read the film backward from the scenes of the zoo as the highly disturbed hallucination of an ostrich with a richly developed sense of social conscience. Alternatively, most of the film might be a Surrealist cut-and-paste rewrite of Becquer's novella that begins with an interrupted reading of the word "paraphernalia". The possibility of multiple segmentations suggests the possibility of multiple subjects. The dream retold in the doctor's office might seem most appropriately assignable to Mr. Foucauld reading either forward or backward. But the camera's pan from Mme. Foucauld to her husband before we see his visions makes it conceivable that she is their dreamer. Locating his dream within hers explains why Mr. Foucauld can hand the doctor a "real" letter: even the doctor's office sequence is part of *her* dream. But then where does her dream end?

The uncertainty of the constituting subject of the sequences of the film contributes much to its narrative instability. Is the episode in the park only the maid's turn as Subject as Suleiman suggests, even though the child Veronique commands much of the screen time and seems to motivate her parents' anxiety in the scenes that follow? Actually, it is the child molester who initiates the tension in this scene. Perhaps he is the Subject, although he disappears quickly. Perhaps an episode is merely the after-effect of the degree to which we are willing to assign an entire set of scenes, or even a single camera move within one shot, an overarching significance. Since the man in the trench coat never becomes a Subject in Suleiman's reading, she neglects to say that an episode might center on his role in the child's experience. Likewise, we may neglect to remember that Buñuel himself has spoken of the Surrealists' pleasure in exposing pornography to children.[24] Perhaps we viewers are infants to whom Buñuel is simply showing screens upon which to project our own pictures, so the pervert may be an important enunciating Subject. To say that there is a single Subject per episode effectively marginalizes the pervert as a speaking subject, which might consequently prevent us from wondering, along with Buñuel, why the provider of provocative postcards is more of a threat than the parents who display sexual behavior on the living room couch.

Global theories of narrative notwithstanding, in terms of cinematic language, episodic boundaries and centers in *The Phantom of Liberty* are not well defined. The narrative is carefully crafted not only to avoid style-setting segmenting between episodes,[25] but to accentuate the lack of overdetermined segmentation that especially characterizes this film among all Buñuel's

films. Each plot twist seems wholly unpredictable yet natural in terms of the cinematic language that they are phrased in. Crucially, the transitions between episodes are indistinguishable from the episodes themselves. When, for example, we realize that Mr. Foucauld has handed off the narrative to the nurse, her story has already started. Her story begins not with the cut that finds her in the car; but with the door in the doctor's office through which we have fluidly been transported from Mr. Foucauld's angst. This careful overlapping of one story with another is effected in terms of the way we read movement within the frame. Buñuel is careful to allow the expectation of returning to Mr. Foucauld to linger by using *continuity* to make the shift between episodes instead of strong cuts or other cinematic statements of severance. Narrative coherence results from a smoothly twisting chain of perverse relationships, since the film perversely refuses to distinguish, finally, between episode and transition. Instead of seeing the shift between Mr. Foucauld, the doctor, and the nurse as a line formed between two successive episodes, it's more productive to see them as co-existing narrative networks that share complex elements of time, character, setting. The camera is not cutting between two episodes: it is panning between the visible effects of two, or more, narrative networks.

Buñuel's knitter, or her twin, the lacemaker, is a sign of the power networks which he will be interrupting in addition to being a signifier of narrative coherence-in-complexity. Finally, she performs as a signature identifying his body of work.[26] Sign of her times, she leads us to Foucault. I read Foucault's analytics of power as an attempt to render power visible and thus, addressable as such. Networks deliver truth to us in the form of a world of institutions and discourse in order to form us into subjects at power's command; Foucault's "genealogy" of sexuality helps us identify power's role in the formulation of our obedience to law in all its forms.

Both Foucault and Buñuel link sexuality to other domains of power, such as politics, statehood, and history. Foucault relies on a historicizing power of language, while Buñuel takes advantage of the participatory dynamics of cinema. Since Buñuel's film sets its critique of power against a vastly different set of expectations of reception and interpretation from those operative for Foucault's text, the performative specificity of these texts becomes apparent. Cinematic fiction offers possibilities off-limits to the historian. Buñuel is able to go further than Foucault in structuring resistance to power, because he works through narrative discourses relying on voyeurism, fear, and humor. In fact, Foucault is even slyly evoked by Buñuel's text in the anxious Mr. Foucauld: the pronunciation is the same.

The History of Sexuality for Foucault, like *The Phantom of Liberty* for Buñuel, comes late in his career as a historian amid mounting critical acclaim, after long periods of controversy. Foucault's history sometimes reads almost as a primer for getting at the subtle and surreal dynamics of the film, to the extent that Foucault's explanation of sexuality in the family neatly backs up Buñuel's depiction of the Foucauld family dynamics. "Modern society is perverse, not in spite of its puritanism or as if from a backlash provoked by its hypocrisy; it is in actual fact, and directly, perverse."[27] Foucault on the family network's production of sexuality:

> Was the nineteenth-century family really a monogamic and conjugal cell? Perhaps to a certain extent. But it was also a network of pleasures and powers linked together at multiple points and according to transformable relationships. The separation of grown-ups and children . . . the relative segregation of boys and girls, the strict instructions as to the care of nursing infants . . . , the attention focused on infantile sexuality, the supposed dangers of masturbation, the importance attached to puberty, the methods of surveillance suggested to parents . . . the presence . . . of servants: all this made the family . . . a complicated network, saturated with multiple, fragmentary, and mobile sexualities. [T]his apparatus . . . was less a principle of inhibition than an inciting and multiplying mechanism.[28]

Buñuel's Foucauld family is perverse in exactly these ways. Buñuel's joke on the homosexual, anti-psychoanalytic Foucault is to name the father after him, cause him to see bewildering visions which seem imaginary and yet have real effects, and then have a doctor tell him to go see a psychoanalyst if he wants to talk about dreams.[29] For each operation that Foucault offers as a feature of power, there is a corresponding reversal or dispersal in Buñuel.

First, the "negative relation": "Where sex and pleasure are concerned, power can "do" nothing but say no to them; what it produces, if anything, is absences and gaps; it overlooks elements, introduces discontinuities, separates what is joined, and marks off boundaries. Its effects take the general form of limit and lack." Rather than a negative relation, Buñuel portrays positive yet indeterminate relations. When the little girl is

shown the "dirty" postcards in the park, she knowingly chuckles along with the pervert, humoring him. The pervert's success continues as the postcards are enjoyed by everyone in the family.

Second, power insists on ruling, and dictates its law to sex: "Which means that first of all sex is placed by power in a binary system: licit and illicit, permitted and forbidden." Through language, the hold on sex is maintained by acts of discourse that articulate a body of law. "The pure form of power resides in the function of the legislator; and its mode of action with regard to sex is of a juridico-discursive nature". Buñuel defracts the rule of law through multiple enunciations within and beyond language. Buñuel accesses and redeploys massive networks both intertextual and corporeal—painting, literature, postcard, cinema—to have various sexualities appear as themselves without speaking the law. The pervert speaks via an exhibition of postcards, and passes on the pleasure without being disciplined. Generally, the film interrupts its sexually active members to turn to stories of police intransigence and repression. But while sexuality links up with a "juridico-discursive" legislative system in *Phantom,* that link works to visualize the relations of power, not to order sexuality through jurisprudence.

Foucault's "cycle of prohibition" means that sex must renounce itself. "Power constrains sex only through a taboo that plays on the alternative between two nonexistences." Could these twin nonexistences be figured as the stone statues guarding the rosy body of the dead virgin saint that the French captain lusts for in *The Phantom of Liberty?* Possibly, but we never find out, as we leave the captain to join the maid. There is always another alternative, and we must move on to try them. Buñuel structures taboo but shows the noncausal effects that surround it in the form of narratives leading elsewhere, away from prohibition, into another story.

Fourth in Foucault's features of power is "the logic of censorship." "The logic of power exerted on sex is the paradoxical logic of a law that might be expressed as an injunction of nonexistence, nonmanifestation, and silence." Buñuel speaks sex, but in such a way as to make it both obvious and uncensorable.

Foucault's fifth feature of power is the uniformity of the apparatus. "Whether one attributes it to the form of the prince who formulates rights, of the father who forbids, of the censor who enforces silence, or of the master who states the law, in any case one schematizes power in a juridical form, and one defines its effects as obedience. Confronted by a power that is law, the subject who is constituted as a subject—who is "subjected"—is he who obeys." Not only is the sex as it is visualized in Buñuel fascinating, it is also patently ridiculous. By parodying the ways in which people obey the rule of power over sex, Buñuel makes it hard to portray the sexualities which he brings to the screen. Further, they are plural, existing in a set of networks which you see but will not likely ever experience. Try as you might, it would be exceedingly hard to obey the Buñuelian communication of sex as it wanders all over France in *The Phantom of Liberty.*[30]

Erotic desire and oppressive political systems are indeed linked in this film, as Linda Williams has pointed out. For Williams, this film begins as a celebration of the pursuit of erotic, political, and narrative transgression, but ends as a recapitulation of our "entanglement" within the "structure of oppositions that give rise to this pursuit in the first place."[31] The film is a surrealist shock statement as *Un Chien Andalou* (1928) was almost fifty years before. She notes that the film does "achieve the same rupture with identification and with belief in the fictive unity of the work" which identifies it as a continuation of the surrealist project. What's different in *The Phantom of Liberty* is an emphasis on metonymy that ensures the smooth transitions by which this film flows, as opposed to the metaphor ruling in *Un Chien Andalou.* Instead of relying on visual metaphors to make the link across a cut, Buñuel has now developed a rhetoric of metonymy to do that work instead.

But to find these transitions, Williams also must segment the film. Instead of Suleiman's twelve segments, Williams finds eight. There's no episode focused on the maid, for example; she simply belongs to the Foucauld family. Because Williams is less concerned with a theoretical convergence of language in literature and film and more interested in a circulation of the "figures of desire" of eros and thanatos, her episodes are defined around sex or death, instead of Suleiman's Subject-protagonist. The maid here is part of a transition from a historical scene of erotic transgression between nations to a modern one within the family.

This accounting works by excluding even more figures from the meaning that we as spectators can produce. What of the servants at work in virtually every Buñuel film, and one servant above all in the later films: Muni, the wonderful character actress who is so overworked by Buñuel in the role of the maid?[32] Returning to her earlier themes of tyranny and convention in her reading of the film in *Blood Cinema,* Marsha Kinder focuses on this role. Kinder notes that it is the maid who leads us out of a situation where a military man is going to rape a dead woman into one where two women discuss property rights and women's place in differing

Four clergymen substitute poker for prayer,

cultures. This shift happens through a female voiceover which at the same time as it challenges the dominant convention of giving the narrating voiceover to a male figure, leads to a serious discussion of property and law. The transition here effectively challenges gender conventions and class knowledge, Kinder points out, shifting us into the present day by "introduc[ing] a class discourse about punishment, power, and property."

Kinder goes on to point out the switching and doubling that go on throughout the film. Extending the idea of paradigmatic variation that Suleiman has used to establish a "radical linearity" in the film, Kinder finds an "array of paradigms" being recombined in the film and reads it as a collection of stories competing for control of the narrative.[33] She gets at how the film mirrors our world by representing competing discourses. Perhaps that mirroring relationship can be characterized by observing the kinds of operations that Buñuel is performing in linking disparate erotic and political narratives (as Williams stresses) at the same time as he shows them to be conventions of form (as Suleiman indicates). Yet, how is it that paradigms can be switched in the way Buñuel allows? More importantly, how is it that we can make the switches that Buñuel sets up? Instances of paradigms are elements . . . and we are back to the network of effects.

Elements in networks of effect belong to more than one network at once; they have multiple names. Buñuel enables paradigm switching by building narratives as networks waiting for activation, and allowing us to make the new links. The links that Buñuel sets up are made through our recognizing *double* or *multiple* figures, such as the two police commissioners who unite to put down a demonstration at the close of the film. A multiple figure might be Muni's role as maid or laborer in many films. Or we recognize a *reversal* when, later in the film, a defecating party stands in for a dinner party. Buñuel is not simply negating or rearranging terms; he did not, for example, show a vomiting party. He is reversing the terms that provoke physical feelings of disgust at the same time as they expose the feelings and customs associated with our most fundamental cultural and architectural discourses. Or we might recognize a *juxtaposition* such as monks seated before an SM scene. Finally, we might see an *opposition,* such as the doctor denying the authenticity of the letter that the dream postman has left Mr. Foucauld, followed by his granting the nurse a leave by virtue of the letter from her father. These narrative actions are the disjunctive operations by which Buñuel's network of effects so smoothly accomplishes its work.

Conclusions

None of these narrative actions is simply a formal choice: they are choices made so that the connections we make reveal links between networks which we normally think of as separate, and so find ourselves surprised at the structures that determine so much of our lives. Technically, the continuity, the framing, and mise

en scène, apart from the pseudo-random narrative connections that are followed, are a double figure in themselves: they twin the most typical types of filmic conventions. Finally, episodes are repeated with variation as the family is doubled and reappears, or as a chief of police confronts and collaborates with his double. Confronted ourselves with a text that demands connections be made, we make links backward and forward over sound and image, perhaps even laterally into other films. We are free to travel through these narrative networks as we will.

Formulating *The Phantom of Liberty* as an impossible narrative structured through narrative networks allows us to contextualize previous critical approaches, which now become specific viewer-configured readings of the film. More importantly, this formulation suggests that *Phantom* might well function as a decoder text for other impossible narratives that have emerged. With impossible narratives we are faced with well-formed works which re-assert the author as an artist in the guise of, well, anything or anyone the author wishes to be, but if not in a specific personage, at least the range of issues or styles that the film screens. These works also function as contradictory audiovisual effects involving the spectator in a deep production of knowledge so that the author becomes irrelevant except as a credited source of the *film* operating as an actor in a theatre of agency. Faced off in a confrontation with the interests of authority, our recourse is to consider that while the social may function as an imaginary, both our bodies *and* our representations are real. Our response is to reconsider what our bodies mean by watching in the first place. Our reconsideration performs a replacement of ourselves for the filmic experience we have just produced. We replace the author and the film as the site of agency, as agency is finally a cinematic effect, and after all, it is we who live, or enliven, the cinema. It took Buñuel decades to perfect his approach to film, to film that works en masse to undo the uniformity of masses. If *The Phantom of Liberty* is still surrealism, it is a surrealism that ironically has required the encoding of cinematic convention at a macrolevel and requires at least a transcultural agreement on those conventions before the fact that they are being overturned can become apparent. Cinema does not invent or prevent empire. Power accommodates and applies cinema. But the masses that cinema produces can become power's undoing.

Buñuel himself suggests that he avoided circularity in this film because "if it closes itself into a circle, it's not liberty, it's death."[35] Once we find ourselves awake in this cinema of hallucinations, confusions, dreams, and provocations, we are free to make them meaningful in ways that Buñuel could not have predicted. But we cannot make them meaningful in ways that restore the power networks that Buñuel is exposing to an unchallenged position, unless we literally forget what we have seen or refuse to interpret it. The usual relationship of surveillance and subject formation has been reversed: power has become visible, and we are safe in the dark to appraise its effects.

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Notes

1. Aranda, Francisco, *Luis Buñuel: A Critical Biography* (New York: Da Capo Press, 1975), 249; and, Buñuel, Luis, *My Last Sigh* (New York: Vintage Books, 1984), 249
2. Kinder, Marsha, "The Tyranny of Convention in *The Phantom of Liberty*," *Film Quarterly* (Summer 1975), 25. Kinder notes that the sounds of gunfire and scenes of violent repression which begin the film are echoed in the final scenes, cueing a "circular framework" since the visuals do not depict the same scenes: the film ends as zoo animals presumably watch gunfire directed at contemporary student demonstrators in France, while it opened with Goya's "The Third of May" which depicts the execution by firing squad of Spanish patriots in Toledo during the Napoleonic Wars.
3. Suleiman, Susan, "Freedom and Necessity: Narrative Structure in *The Phantom of Liberty*," *Quarterly Review of Film Studies* (Summer, 1978), 289.
4. Ibid., 295: "I would hesitate to affirm [Kinder's thematics of tyranny] so strongly; the humor of the film, although it can be read as very bitter, can also be read as detached. The word "tyranny" evokes too tragic a mood, I think, for this film."
5. Williams, Linda, *Figures of Desire* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1981). "Because tyranny and slavery exist, there is a dream of freedom; because objects are beyond our reach, we desire them; and because stories have continuous linear movements, storytellers want to escape them. In each case the tyranny of law creates the desire for a phantom freedom. The phantom of liberty is born in the existence of chains" (178). Williams wraps up the film with repression creating the desire to escape it. Liberty doesn't pre-exist tyranny, but is tyranny's effect on desiring subjects. We cannot interpret here any moral statement about our "condition" or the state of our world: to read the film in terms of an animal revolt and human repression of it is to impose "moral categories" upon the film (177).
6. Barthes, Roland, *S/Z,* Miller, Richard, trans., (New York: Hill and Wang, 1974), 18–21.
7. Hubel, David H., *Eye, Brain and Vision,* (New York: Scientific American Library, 1988), 24. Hubel's "circuits" of

brain cells appear as networked structures in his diagrams which illustrate "neurotransmitters," "receptors," "input," "output." His figures echo Marvin Minsky's positing of networks of communicating agents that produce the effects we understand as "intelligence," "emotion," somewhere after perceptual processing ends, "memory," "thought," and "soul" begin. See Note 11.

8. Malamud, Carl, *Stacks: Interoperability in Today's Computer Networks,* (New York: Prentice Hall, 1992), 198, Malamud's elegant "star" topology reminds us of the highly representational nature of the real-world networks that process knowledge. The more mundane "World Wide Web" is a meta-network enabled by a widely agreed upon specification for the transfer of data between computers of different types over a plurality of redundant links (the Internet) that, in this country at least, was designed as a military medium that would ensure the transmission of sensitive information in the event of a nuclear war. Networks with redundant links are "fault-tolerant," resistant to systemic failure.
9. Slocum, Jonathan, editor, *Machine Translation Systems,* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1985), 76. Here, the network figure is intended to model our knowledge of language, not the neural processes themselves. Knowledge is held in a network form that is processed via rules of grammar into linguistic surface structures. Elements are linked by specific names which related those elements in a propositional equation which must describe the real-world nature of the referent of the word in question.
10. Cottrell, Garrison W., *A Connectionist Approach to Word Sense Disambiguation* (San Mateo, CA: Morgan Kaufman Publishers, Inc., 1989), 28. A connectionist approach that sets out an explicit metaphor between neural processing and the machine processing of language. Ambiguous meanings are eliminated by "training" wherein the network "learns" how to suppress certain elements to produce the "correct" parse.
11. Minsky, Marvin, *The Society of Mind* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1986), 17, 168. Minsky arranges "agents" in "societies," networks of linked elements. He avoids the word network, arguing implicitly that networks are societies. Instead of societies being networked, networks are socialized. Minsky seeks to understand humans as "wonderful machines", but cautions that "machine" has negative connotations that we are better off forgetting.
12. Ibid., 19.
13. Ibid., 307, emphasis added.
14. Foucault, Michel, *The History of Sexuality: An Introduction* (New York: Vintage Books, 1978), 30.
15. Ibid., 46.
16. Ibid., 61: "In Greece, truth and sex were linked, in the form of pedagogy, by the transmission of a precious knowledge from one body to another; sex served as a medium for initiations into learning. For us, it is in the confession that truth and sex are joined, through the obligatory and exhaustive expression of an individual secret. But this time it is truth that serves as a medium for sex and its manifestations."
17. de la Colina, Jose, and Turrent, Tomas Perez, *Objects of Desire* (New York: Marsilio Publishers, 1992), 216 . Others have interpreted this line as "Long live the fallen!" and the film's English subtitle translates it as "Down with Liberty!" Buñuel himself gives the line as I have included it above in de la Colina and Turrent's text.
18. Buñuel, 249. The director also states that this film is one of his favorites; *The Phantom of Liberty* in any case is a signature work by the director, including many of his trademark images (sewing paraphernalia, or insects, for example). Buñuel claimed it as his "most surrealist film" in Aranda's *Luis Buñuel: A Critical Biography.*
19. Suleiman, 282. A sequence is defined as "a limited series of events" after a proposal from Roland Barthes.
20. Suleiman, 283.
21. Suleiman, 288. Suleiman diagrams the film as a linear progression from one episode, built around a "Subject," to another.
22. Suleiman, 289.
23. Eberwein, Robert. *Film and the Dream Screen* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984), 140–141.
24. Buñuel, 121.
25. Buñuel describes his reshooting a scene because the excessively stylized way he had designed the shot with his cameraman was "vulgar." He also describes working out a very stylized movement with his cameraman, with the preparations ending in laughter, and them proceeding to shoot the shot in a much simpler fashion. Cf. Aranda, 198, on the shooting of *Viridiana,* for a comparison between Buñuel's purposefully indistinct framing and montage and the spectacular film language of Eisenstein.
26. Her figure recalls Madame DeFarge in Dickens' *A Tale of Two Cities,* who not only is a recurring figure in the unwinding of Dickens' narrative but finally turns out to be a subversive figure working to overthrow the French monarchy.
27. Foucault, 47.
28. Ibid., 46.
29. Part of Foucault's project in the *History of Sexuality* was to see psychoanalysis as one of the ways that sexuality is produced through confession. *The History of Sexuality* was originally published in French in 1976, while *the Phantom of Liberty* was released in 1974.
30. Foucault, 83–85.
31. Williams, 178.
32. Muni plays a maid in *Diary of a Chambermaid, Belle de Jour* and other films, while in *The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie* she plays a working class neighbor to the prosperous drug-dealing couple at whose home the film begins.
33. Kinder, Marsha, *Blood Cinema,* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 332.
34. For example, Lynch's *Lost Highway* (1997) or Soderberg's *Schizopolis* (1997).
35. Colina and Turrent, 218.
36. The ability of a mystery projected by another to clarify a vision of one's own world is a constant theme in Buñuel: cf. *My Last Sigh,* 88.

In Memoriam

Albert Johnson

Assistant Editor, 1958–1962
Editorial Board Member, 1962–1998

Albert died with his film boots on—in Chicago, where he had gone to be a guest host at the Chicago Film Festival. With his death we lose a big part of *Film Quarterly*'s history. On the masthead, Albert was Assistant to the Editor from the founding of this magazine in Fall 1958 until Fall 1962; then he became a member of the Editorial Board, as he remained for the rest of his life. But his importance was much greater than these bare facts might indicate. When I was seeking co-conspirators to begin a new kind of serious American film magazine, Pauline Kael (then living in Berkeley) sent me to Albert and we joined forces, along with Colin Young (then an assistant professor at UCLA) to dream of and to publish our first issues. Albert had earlier edited his own occasional journal, *Imagery.* That, together with his work with the San Francisco Film Festival, which was then just getting started, gave us perspectives and connections which proved essential in those tenuous first years. And, from the earliest issues on, whenever he could find time to write articles for the *Quarterly,* they were always warmly received for their wisdom and their unique information, especially on American black cinema.

As Albert's life evolved into what seemed to the rest of us a rather blessed alternation of teaching at UC Berkeley and spending summers on the European film festival circuit, he was always our guide to what was new in the world of film. In his wonderfully passionate way, he would come back to Berkeley and regale us with tales of new films, of new filmmakers, and occasionally—though he reported gossip only in the gentlest terms—of scandals. We at the *Quarterly,* like his students and his other colleagues, loved him for his contagious delight in film, his encyclopedic knowledge of its past and present, his joy in its graces of music and dance, his generosity toward creative novelty. He contributed his talents and his enthusiasm to many festivals (he originated the retrospectives and tributes that are now featured everywhere), to his teaching, and to his lecturing all over the world, as well as to the *Quarterly.* In the long trajectory of his life, from youth in Harlem (his mother was a dancer at the Cotton Club) to his mature years in Berkeley, he led a charmed and inspirational life. He was irreplaceable, and we will remember him with respect and affection.

Ernest Callenbach

Albert appeared at my first *Film Quarterly* board meeting a little late—he had a great feeling for an entrance—and full of wonderful stories about new films he had seen over the summer at Cannes and Munich and Karlovy Vary and Teheran and Jerusalem and Moscow and. . . . Could he really have been in all those places that one summer? Albert was somehow mythical in his ability to travel. (He also turned out to be mythical in his devotion not only to the discussion of film but also to the consuming of dessert—preferably chocolate.) Later, he would send me postcards—one of him on a boat (Cannes?) wearing a white seersucker suit and laughing. He was glamorous and debonair and witty—and romantically and intellectually deeply committed to film. His contribution to *Film Quarterly* is but a small part of the contribution he made and the pleasure he gave—to students and colleagues, to filmmakers and film lovers, and to his friends all over the world. Thank you, Albert.

Ann Martin

John Wayne's Epic of Contradictions

The Aesthetic and Rhetoric of War and Diversity in *The Alamo*

Rodney Farnsworth

The time has come for a total revaluation of John Wayne's *The Alamo* (1960); however, it must above all else be a filmic valuation and only secondarily cultural and political history. Although I would hesitate to term it a "great film," I see in it a sufficiently high merit as to demand a rigorous aesthetic examination and to be compared with the best films of its kind: great historical epics. The themes of *The Alamo* are not without complexity. Above all else, the film is about rhetoric. And of course it is a political rhetoric; one that defies being compartmentalized by the rather meaningless dichotomy of the Republican Tweedle-Dum and the Democratic Tweedle-Dee. Only the broadest political terms that range across the entire course of United States history can contain the significance of the film's themes. Only such an enlarged viewpoint will allow a full judgement of the intricate connections between John Wayne's Crockett and the historical simulacrum. While the political man played into the hands of the industrial-military complex of late-capitalistic America, I will employ evidence—especially from inside but also outside the film—to demonstrate that John Wayne the filmmaker and the man was suspicious of military and corporate institutions. While he allowed himself to be cast as a superpatriot and spoke with pride about being an American, *The Alamo* is not the work of some xenophobic North American looking southward with anything faintly resembling a racial hatred or a cultural contempt. There are even indications in the pre-production of the film and within the work itself, as well as in the life of the filmmaker, that for him—if on an intuitive level, perhaps—America is something larger, more diverse, and more inclusive than just the United States.

Unfortunately, in order to get to the aesthetic and thematic core of the film, we have to clear away the two mythic John Waynes—the conservative hero and the liberal villain. They are the obverse and reverse of the same late-capitalist coin. Over the last few years, two works—neither the product of complete film scholarship—have appeared that carry both myths to new levels of muddle. On the conservative side is *John Wayne: American* by two historians, Randy Roberts and James S. Olson. "When others called for détente and pacifism," they write, "he insisted that evil exists in the world and must be crushed with righteous violence. John Wayne's feet were firmly planted in American bedrock. When the liberal interlude ended in the 1980s, and faith, individualism, and love of country were no longer suspect, John Wayne was home again."[1] While there may be other Wayne films that fit this simplistic conception, *The Alamo* is a film without a clear villain, and it is unclear precisely what country is loved. A somewhat more substantial treatment of the film *qua* film and a more insidiously dangerous approach is to be had on the liberal side—Garry Wills' *John Wayne's America.*[2] Wills' bourgeois mask of total objectivity—which remains the shibboleth of journalism and of archaic scholarship—is atavistic in the extreme. It is as if the last two decades of critical dialogue on film, literature, and the other arts never happened. Although he sets out to examine John Wayne's mythic America, his analysis is more about Wills' own myth of an

impartial gnosis, a higher objectivity standing above all personal points of view. Scholars like Sandra Harding have made it clear that anything resembling objectivity can be reached only by an acknowledgement by each and every scholar that s/he represents one standpoint among many; indeed, it is precisely the difference, the Otherhood, of the standpoint that makes a considerable contribution toward any greater collective objectivity.[3]

Guided by his unselfconscious methodology, Wills has made a bit of a mess in *The Alamo* research by questionable appeals to earlier history that will definitely demand a bit of housecleaning. He gives a fairly thorough comparison between the historical Alamo and Wayne's version presented in the film; however, all this is written with blithe indifference to the long-standing literary and filmic theorizing over the subtle connection between history in fictional narrative—in historical film, as well as novel or drama—and in actual history. Changes of historical facts are certainly allowed. The key question of criticism has been: were the changes aesthetically necessary? Wills, moreover, had the critical option of taking the director's own evaluation of his raw story material: "I think," Wayne is quoted as saying, "it's the greatest piece of folklore ever brought down through history."[4] That is a fairly sophisticated reading of the way in which a long stream of facts or events that we term history also freights discrete little quanta of folk legends that are created by, as well as the creators of, facts and events. The weaver of an historical fiction arguably has the right to choose plot motifs from both facts and folklore. Having read, however, the same historical works that Wills cited in his endnotes, I find that Wayne and his scriptwriter—probably more amanuensis (James Edward Grant)—remained much closer to the facts than Wills implies; indeed, they did exactly what he did: they chose among several facts.

Let me take just a single "fact" that Wills brings to bear against Wayne. In his highly regarded history of the Texas Revolution, Stephen L. Hardin poses alternatives with uncertainty and caution: "On January 17, therefore, Houston dispatched Bowie and a company of volunteers to Béxar. The general later claimed that he instructed Bowie to 'blow up the Alamo and abandon the place,' but the order appeared to have been discretionary."[5] While citing Hardin in his endnotes, Wills dispenses with the hedges and other metadiscourse, by which means an historian negotiates his way through the contradictory data of history: "In fact, Houston had earlier sent orders that the Alamo be abandoned and destroyed."[6] Wills continues to reiterate this "fact" against the historicity of *The Alamo*. And yet, while it is folklore and mythos first, the film evidences a not unimpressive care with the certifiable facts of history. So I will treat the storyline as folklore, yet also show how Wayne's clear deviations or reshapings of fairly substantiated historical facts often were done for reasons that many activists might today call "politically correct" because they seem to have promoted a certain inchoate, but still real, attempt at affirming cultural diversity. Ultimately, I seek to show how Wayne embeds in *The Alamo* a rather incisive consideration of rhetoric and class structure. First, however, I would like to review the (for the time, of course) avant-garde aesthetic and economic aspects of Wayne's film—that is, embed it in its film-historical context.

The Alamo is quite clearly John Wayne's own film—indeed, it is an auteur film. I am using the now out-of-date word auteur with some irony, but only some. Being an auteur implies having control over the film, and the critiques and qualifications of auteur theory, over the past two decades, have had to do with the part played by the producer in the creation of a film—especially under the old studio system. Wayne broke with the old ways by making himself the producer. In a survey of all Alamo films, Frank Thompson writes about the crucial job of a producer—financing: "The way Wayne financed *The Alamo* was revolutionary at the time, but has since become standard operating procedure." Essentially, working outside the closed studio system and using only the more open-ended United Artists as the basis for financial respectability and on a matching-funds basis, Wayne set about systematically seeking and soaking Texas capitalists, if not for all they were worth, at least for large sums. He used as his money-getting leverage the point that Texas pressure had forced upon him a Texan location rather than the Mexican or Panamanian one he had preferred. It was also at this point that he introduced the worst of his chauvinistic posturing about the film: Support the American Way and invest in this film.[7] One can imagine that his rhetoric carried a lot of clout with Texas oil and cattle millionaires; to the detriment of the critical fortune of the film, his post-production adman later tried the same line on a Hollywood still seething about the communist-hunting MacCarthy days. Can this period of begging Texas money have left its mark on Wayne? Surprisingly, no one has noticed that in this otherwise villainless film (as I will later discuss, even the attacking Mexicans are not portrayed negatively enough to be termed villains—not even Santa Anna), the one really villainous, thoroughly unredeemed, and hateful character is a local Texan merchant, Emil Sande

(Wesley Lau)—a thorough opportunist, motivated by greed. Could this very unsavory Texas capitalist be a sort of built-in payback for all the begging Wayne had to do from Sande's latter-day incarnations? Wayne's Sande character is a satiric presentation of greed, opportunism, and exploitation of labor; yet, it also allows for some delightful comedy, especially when Wayne makes the merchant tip the young Mexican luggage bearer (Rogelio Estrada), a delightful addition to the cast of thousands.

Whatever Wayne might have felt about raising the money, he scrapped enough together by various means to realize his vision on a grand scale and to achieve convincing scenes of massive proportions, which compare favorably with the great epic films of Europe and America.

In *The Alamo,* the first appearance of the approaching forces of Santa Anna establishes Wayne's ability to orchestrate crowd scenes, so crucial to epics, by starting with shots of groups of the army and climaxing in the traditional establishing long-shot. We first see parts of the advanced force, followed later by the multicolumned movements of the Mexican army's main units. The crowds are made to trace out beautiful patterns across the screen. Moving lines of troops are contrasted with standing squares of other units. The last shot of a column of troops dissolves into a parallel stream of Mexican immigrants fleeing the army; later, the only atrocity we see is that committed by Santa Anna against local Mexicans—the lines of his calvary herding them into a circle. With the exception of the Italy sequence in Abel Gance's *Napoleon* or the Kazan sequence in Sergei Eisenstein's *Ivan the Terrible,* I know of no more powerful choreography of lines and columns of soldiers advancing across the landscape and screen than these Mexican Army scenes.

Rhetorically, of course, these scenes from Wayne's film offer the inverse of Gance's vision of French imperialism and Eisenstein's vision of Russian imperialism because it is the Mexican Army that is the great conquering force, moving north to bring yet another recalcitrant minority under the fold of Santa Anna's centrism. In Wayne's conception, Yankee imperialism is downplayed and is certainly not an organized national expression. And this fits history because the US government was reluctant to accept Texas into the union and delayed it for a decade. Texas, like many other regions of Mexico, had already had a history of separatist leanings. After all, a not yet Anglicized Texas had tried to break away from New Spain—that is, from a Mexico loyal to the Spanish king; the then young Santa Anna had been on another general's staff to help defeat the army of Bernardo Gutiérrez de Lara.[8] And this was only one of many such rebellions/revolutions that the able Santa Anna had to put down throughout his career. These historical revolts are essential to coming to grips with the ambivalence with which Wayne treats the Mexican Army. While on the one hand the almost paradeground aesthetics with which the armies are posed and moved undercuts the brutality of this vision of military might, the dialogue among the usual chorus of Crockett's Tennesseans reminds us they are formidable and why:

> "That's the best-dressed army I ever saw."
> "Fancy clothes don't make a fighting man."
> "They were just off two years putting down revolts: they're fighting men."

Hardin includes in his history elaborate reconstructions of the actual mission of San Antonio de Béxar (Alamo) and of the illustrations of directions taken in the final stage of the Mexican penetration of the defenses. Comparing these drawings to Wayne's mission reveals how close this filmed folktale comes to the historian's version of the original, with the occasional variation of a missing wall, or a more solid wall, or a transplanted flag. One must further consider that—since much of the Alamo's fortifications have long been obliterated—the historian's illustrations and the filmmaker's images are each reconstructed rather than actual; so, neither has absolute claim as fact. And I have certainly seen many filmic versions of the Roman Forum, say, that rarely come anywhere close to what it ever looked like at any time in its ancient history. Hardin's reconstruction of the lines of Mexican attack and entry, however, seem to fit perfectly with those in the film. This attack culminates in the final explosion when, unhistorically, Crockett blows up the powder magazine.[9] If I am allowed an appeal to an overworked term in dramatic criticism, it does seem that, after all that has happened, this explosion offers a needed catharsis. This event brings the narrative full cycle because much of this powder was taken from the renegade merchant, Emil Sande, during the first violent encounter of the film. The explosion gives a shape, a marked contour, to what might have remained bits of cinematic *tours de force,* and allows aesthetic considerations to take precedence over historical as is appropriate to a fictional form. Dissecting the last battle into its component techniques may give the impression that it had all been done before by other filmmakers; however, the overall effect is one of an almost indefinable freshness and power. Part of the reason for this effect might be the cumulative rhythm and increasing tempo that Wayne and his editors cre-

ated in the cutting room; one that moves from order to chaos. In the final analysis, I would propose that each part fits with apt inevitability into the whole, which is greater than the sum of the individual techniques.

While *The Alamo* has all the scope and sweep of epic films, like them it also suffers from an episodic structure, underscored with the, by then, old fashioned use of fades to and from black. In judging this episodic quality, however, we should keep in mind that although the work follows an epic structure (one that treats large groups as much as individuals), it does not extend across vast distances; that the work treats only the events within and around a fort, with the sole journey being that of the Mexican Army to the siege; that such a static subject lacks the binding thread of a journey, like the journey of *Stagecoach,* say, or the cattle drive of *Red River.* Yet, *The Alamo* differs from these epics in its vaster and warmer inclusiveness, with (often episodic) moments that truly celebrate social and ethnic diversity. In order to describe these moments, let me borrow a term from art history: genre painting. The film is filled with moments that show ordinary people behaving characteristically or at least giving that feeling. There is something so warm and compelling in the cantina scene where the Tennesseans dance, drink, and fight that I cannot help thinking of the tavern and other party scenes of the Dutch genre painters of the seventeenth century. This scene, as a matter of fact, made me aware for the first time how little fun or sense of community is ever experienced in the typical saloon—let alone a cantina—in Westerns; saloons are inevitably places of paranoia; cantinas, of xenophobia. Wayne not only has his Tennesseans and Mexicans do plenty of couple dancing, he also has them view an impromptu fandango that parallels a later and more formal one in Santa Anna's encampment.

The film's diversity is also a diversity of human types—indeed, of eccentrics. These range from the likeable but rather dumb and alcoholic Beekeeper (Chill Wills), to the eccentrically pious but tolerant Parson (Hank Worden), to the puritanical and proud lawyer, William Barret Travis (Laurence Harvey). Weighted in the balance of the film's heroic scales, Travis's dislikeable nature is discounted because he is good at his job, loyal to the new Republic of Texas, and the ultimate rhetorical master of word, symbols, and deeds. As General Sam Houston (Richard Boone) tells Travis when he gives him command of the rear-guard holding action that we call the Alamo: "Travis, I've never been able to like you, but you are another one of the very few men that I'd trust with the life of Texas." When Travis insults the commonness and oddity of Bowie (knife fighting was considered low and deviant behavior), Crockett says, "I figured any fellow that shouldered a gun was deserving of respect." This is the measuring stick that Wayne and his scriptwriter use to measure men—beyond this, a wide variety of eccentricity is allowed.

Part of this open vision of a diverse humanity is Wayne's very positive presentation of the Mexicans.

Richard Widmark, John Wayne, and Laurence Harvey in *The Alamo.*

Garry Wills avoids the Mexican theme in *The Alamo* and omits to mention one of the few academic treatments of this film, an article by Paul Andrew Hutton. This historian observes that Wayne "had a high regard for Hispanic culture—his wives were all Hispanic—and he was careful not to insult Mexican sensibilities. Thus Santa Anna appears as a gallant gentleman, instead of a despotic dictator, and many Mexicans fight prominently on the side of the Texans." Actually, Wayne makes it clear, in his own myth of the Alamo, that his Mexicans are just as much "Texans" as the Anglos, and further, that their contribution to a larger pan-American superculture is just as valid as any. Hutton cites several instances where Wayne's Alamo was ridiculed, in American popular publications, for what was perceived as "Wayne's overly sensitive portrayal of Hispanics."[10] If, then, this film was indeed meant to be some sort of chauvinistic celebration of the USA brand of the American as Roberts and Olson suggest,[11] it certainly fails. I leave to my Chicano colleagues in film studies the critique of anglocentrism and other contradictions in Wayne's presentation of the Mexicans; I similarly leave to those better adept at wielding the techniques of Michel Foucault to find the economic underbelly of Wayne's magnanimity (his desire not to alienate a potential Mexican audience, say). I have contented myself with applying the acid test developed by one of the United States' greatest minds in political praxis—Frederick Douglass, who said of Abraham Lincoln: "Viewed from the genuine abolition ground, Mr. Lincoln seemed tardy, cold, dull, and indifferent: but measuring him by the sentiment of his country, a sentiment he was bound as a statesman to consult, he was swift, zealous, radical, and determined."[12] As Hatton indicates, Wayne stands up fairly well when viewed against the norm of his North American filmgoers, especially when one considers he was treating a mythos poised on the brink of xenophobia.

It is not only significant that, in his treatment of the Mexicans, Wayne radically deviates from history, but it is even more crucial that he seems to do so for reasons other than narrative expediency. Two scenes involving Don Juan Seguín will illustrate. One of the darkest moments after Texan independence and nationhood was the unconscionable xenophobic denial of citizenship to this patriot—many Mexicans and Chicanos would use a different term, of course—present at the Alamo only in the early part of the siege. Wayne implies that Seguín is going to die at the Alamo. He does this in a scene that has clearly been prepared and is paralleled with one near the beginning of the film. In the first, Seguín's entrance into the still partly unwalled Alamo is treated as an unwelcome invasion, rifles are aimed at him, and Travis is rather insulting. Seguín's second entrance—when Travis gives a warm speech welcoming the Tejanos' comrades, to the surprise of Seguín and Bowie—is a clear resolution of the earlier. Can it be that Wayne is symbolically righting an old wrong when he admits Seguín into the Texas Valhalla, by having him enter into the hallowed walls with the Gonzales volunteers and, implicitly, die with them? The representation of Santa Anna is even more remarkable. José Enrique de la Peña left a contemporary account of the massacre of the surviving defenders, possibly including Crockett; is it possible that Wayne deviated from history to protect the hero? Since De la Peña makes it clear that Crockett and the rest faced mutilation and death bravely, the hero had no need of protection. It is clear to me that Wayne is protecting the Mexicans, especially Santa Anna, who is said to have ordered the massacre. Had Wayne really wanted to do a hate-mongering, melodramatic confrontation of us against the Evil Other, then a massacre finale would have been perfect. According to Hutton's research, Wayne would have had considerable support in the popular media for just such an anti-Mexican approach. A further diffusion of any partisan hatred might be expected from the purging effect of the final explosion, as well as Santa Anna's gallant gestures toward the surviving mother and children.

But love for people and things Mexican runs even deeper, and Wayne offers in one night-for-night scene a true appreciation, without the slightest shred of condescension from a hegemonic position of supposed Northern cultural superiority. The conversation between Bowie and Crockett on the patio of the cantina, with the night photography and the location shooting underscoring Smitty's joy that "It's Mexico" and Bowie's reminding us what Mexico signifies:

> Oh, Davy, if you only knew Mexico! It's wonderful. . . . Big valleys between high mountains. Just everything a man could want in the way of country, for looking at or for growing on. Mostly it's the people, Davy . . . they got . . . and this is kinda hard to explain . . . they got courage, and they got dignity: they ain't afraid to die, and what seems most important to me: they ain't afraid to live. Today's important to them, not the dollar tomorrow might bring. I suppose the Yankee says that's lazy. Me, I say it's a way of living.

Certainly, any such attempt at generalizing about national character borders on stereotyping; however,

Bowie's stereotyping is as much against the North American as the Mexican, and the tone of deep appreciation, even love, is unmistakable. If one considers this view of the simpler aspects of Mexican life along with the technological competence and professionalism of Santa Anna's army, we see that Wayne is struggling towards a comprehensive rather than a stereotyped view of Mexican culture. The lengthy filmtime and the aesthetic care lavished on this scene suggest an intensity and larger significance within this speech. The way that this scene blurs the line between what is Texas and what is Mexico constitutes Wayne's way of saying that such distinctions are irrelevant in that region and culture we term Southwest.

Graziella Carmella Maria de Lopez e Béxar ("Flaca"), the widow, is central to the film's celebration of *Tejanos* (Spanish-Texan) culture. Wills calls her "Wayne's Spanish love interest awkwardly added to the story"; he later writes, "Wayne himself, with his preference for Latin women, promised the part of his love interest to a young Argentinean." Will's syntactic confusion between Wayne and Crockett has particular significance. Wayne may fall short of 1990's standards of presenting women, but he comes out fairly well when compared to the critic who wrote these remarks in 1997. "Wayne's Spanish love interest" and "his preference for Latin women" are not only a sexist and racist way of describing Flaca (Linda Cristal), but an inaccurate description of the part she plays in the film. She is a member of an old, aristocratic *Tejanos* family, which seems to have been almost wiped out by Santa Anna's henchmen. She is proud of what she terms "the way of her people," and she carries herself with an ancient dignity, which Wills mislabels "robotic stiffness." Above all, Flaca is certainly not, as he says, "awkwardly added to the story."[13] Even before we meet Davy Crockett, we learn from the young Smitty (Frankie Avalon) that he knows a little Spanish. An extraordinary amount of the dialogue between Davy and Flaca has to do with her helping him with his poor Spanish.[14] She translates into Spanish and, then, translates back into English one of his crowning rhetorical flourishes: a letter that Davy pretends to have received from Santa Anna in order to employ it during his cantina "seminar" to convince his Tennesseans that they should intervene in the affairs of Mexico and the new Texas; he dramatizes what the Mexican dictator might have written to these potential allies of the Texan cause. Crockett's line to Flaca, "You know a million words, and how they should be used," is a tribute to her bilingualism, her transculturality.

Throughout *The Alamo,* the value of words—of rhetoric, even—is again and again celebrated and, occasionally, critiqued. The three male protagonists represent three types of eloquence, consisting not just of verbal rhetoric, but of a whole system of visual and enacted signifiers as well. Among themselves, the trio rate the skillful use of words as highly as they rate the use of fists, knives, and guns. Each represents one of three attitudes toward leadership and toward the common people who are led. Crockett is the Jeffersonian leader by consensus-forming among the people, whom he trusts; Travis is the Hamiltonian leader who rules by elitist distance combined with pomp and ceremony to overawe the people, whom he distrusts; Bowie is the Jacksonian leader who manipulates the people with the common touch, which barely hides the self-made man's ruthless disregard for others.[15] Bowie is one upon whom the whole concept of using words to persuade is lost. Slogans that convey opinions of how to do things ("cut, slash, and run") and short moments of self-expressive hyperboles are all he can manage. On the positive side, Bowie does treat the *Tejanos* Seguín and Flaca with elaborate and warm respect. On the negative side, Bowie is shown to fall into a temper with his peers and to use what Travis as well as Crockett call "pyrotechnics." With the men he leads, Bowie is shown to rule with a kick in the rump, and he never answers their questions—unlike Crockett, who is just as likely to conduct political seminars for his Tennesseans as not. In leadership essentials, Bowie's Jacksonian lowbrow arrogance places him closer in quality to Travis and very far from Crockett; it might be added here that the historical David Crockett thought that Andrew Jackson, "King Andrew" as he was always calling him, was "a greater tyrant than Cromwell, Caesar or Bonaparte."[16]

Wayne's Crockett is again and again shown fighting the temptation toward too much control over his men, whom he manages with a common touch without condescension. As Travis tells Crockett after their first conversation: "You're not the illiterate country bumpkin you would have people believe; you speak an excellent and concise English when you wish—the bad grammar is a pose." Crockett's reply makes it clear that it is a carefully constructed and projected rhetorical ethos: "Well, a fella's got to do a lot of things to get elected to Congress." Crockett admits he is a liar and reiterates this fact at various points throughout the film. When Travis says, "You came to Texas to fight along with us," Crockett responds: "Don't tell my Tennesseans that. They think we came to Texas to hunt and drink"; this is not history or folklore, but it is Wayne. As I will

discuss in a different context, Wayne seems to suggest that the public lie—or, as it was called during Contra/Irangate, "disinformation"—has its place in leadership. While Crockett and Travis share a certain condescension for their rhetorical audience (the Tennesseans and the Texans), Crockett demonstrates a better feel for how to appeal to that audience and, thereby, shows himself to be a master rhetorician. This mastery comes across in his word to Travis, who at least on a verbal level fails to realize the importance of audience praxis. Travis had asked earlier: "I'd like your permission to make a speech to your men." To which, Wayne responds, "Well, they heard many a speech when I was congressifying. What would you talk about?"

> "Oh, about freedom, liberty."
> "Well, they don't need any such speech.
> These men are from Tennessee."

The latter is more than just populist posing; Jefferson found his greatest allies against Hamilton among the frontier people. The importance of Jefferson to Wayne's vision is emphasized by the fact that Captain Dickinson (Ken Curtis) is also a Jeffersonian leader, like Crockett.

It would be wrong to think that Crockett is the sole mouthpiece of the filmmaker. With the help of his scriptwriter (James Edward Grant), Wayne shows real skill in the dramatic presentation of ideas; it must be an exchange in which no one person tells the whole truth, but only part of the whole; very difficult issues can, often, best resonate on the stage and screen when left without a definite solution. It is Travis, and not Crockett, who delivers to Dickinson the "why we fight" and also "how we rule" speech that is central to the political and rhetorical themes of *The Alamo:*

> I can't let that rabble know how weak we are and how strong the enemy is. I couldn't, my honest and plainspoken friend. I know you think my attitude incongruous with the views of your idol, Mr. Thomas Jefferson, the messiah of equality. You think it snobbish of me to feel I am better than rabble. Tell me this: suppose we accept the first half of your Jefferson's theory of equality and grant that all men draw their first breath as equals. Now let us project that life to the grave, which awaits us all. Do you deny that most men live lives of craven compromise, of snatching every shabby opportunity to feather their nest, to be quick to raise the call for safety and security, while they let the other man volunteer, let the other man carry the rifle, let the other man face the hard call of honor? Why, even your Mr. Jefferson, writing in his ivory tower in Monticello, had to admit that most men are like that, and only a few—unhappily a very few—go to their graves with their honor untarnished, never have grabbed for the wealth that comes from opportunism or the popularity that comes with

John Wayne as Davy Crockett.

> catering to those smelly masses. And can you or any sane person or your sainted Thomas Jefferson claim that such men are no more than the equal of the creatures down below? And so I say that . . . I am better than that rabble down there.

These are dreary ethics indeed. John Wayne, his fellow Republicans, and (let us not forget) the Democrats have all rarely been able to trust the people and have rarely renounced the efficacy of a lie in motivating them to higher ends. The few presidents who have been more likely to tell the cold truth over a comfortable lie have never been popular—except by hindsight, and only when they are safely out of office or dead.

The Travis of the film is neither popular nor a very adept liar, with words anyway. He represents the rotund rhetoric so popular in the opening decades of the nineteenth century: however, most telling is his ability to use rituals rhetorically. When Bowie's men arrive, there is an elaborate flag raising ceremony—flying the old 1824 colors of Texas colonialization, (Mexican) provincehood, and by this point, nationhood: an act that signals that the Alamo *is* Texas and, as such, must be defended to the last man. When Crockett's men arrive, later Seguín's, Bowie gives flattering welcomes that have their effect on the rhetorical audience, as the montage indicates. And, yet, as some of the shots indicate, there is always something faintly absurd about his hyperbole. Only during the desperate speech to keep Bowie's, Seguín's, and Crockett's men from leaving does Travis speak with simple, real-sounding force. He finally learns what Davy Crockett, the real rhetorician of the film, has known all along: one must adapt the delivery to the intended audience.

This brings up the real rhetorical point of the film, offered in answer to its big question: why take a stand at the Alamo? Wayne's answer is clear. Gesture—it is one of those powerful gestures that make a myth, that motivate human actions, that create nations. In the most limited military sense, attempting to hold the Alamo is in the film made to seem a mistake. The night raid on the big artillery piece and then the one to get beef demonstrate the efficacy of guerilla warfare—that is, of Bowie's plan to launch harassing maneuvers on Santa Anna's troops at river crossings over that of Travis' plan to hold the Alamo. In terms of reason and effectiveness, at least in the short term goal of killing the maximum number of Santa Anna's men, Bowie's "cut, slash, and run" alternative is better than that offered by Travis—sustaining a siege at an undermanned Alamo. To accept this, however, is to ignore what I would like to say again is the implied but overarching theme of the film: the great rhetorical power embodied in Travis's decision to make a great but desperate stand on the sunlit stage, as it were, of Alamo Mission. In Wayne's revisioning of the historical figure, Travis—who again and again shows the rhetorical power of symbolic gestures and rituals—realizes that a Founder's Myth is what is most needed by the infant freedom movement in Texas. Indeed, he is willing to pay the price of martyrdom for such a myth. It is precisely with just such a gesture that Travis sets the Alamo martyrdom in motion: he interrupts the surrender-now-or-no-quarter speech of one of Santa Anna's officers (played by the famous bullfighter, Carlos Arruza) by firing off a cannon. In Wayne's vision, Travis is pure theater; he is Hollywood before the fact.

Wayne—the public man of the Hollywood Ten investigations of the McCarthy days, the spokesman for the Vietnam war effort, and occasionally when he was defending *The Alamo*—often allowed the rhythm of his rhetoric to fall into lockstep with his official ideology.[17] Wayne, the filmmaker, is his own man. At almost every turn in his efforts as filmmaker, Wayne's ideology subverts itself, with one big exception: the ambivalence about the managerial/political lie embodied in Crockett's speech to the men after the death of the Parson (Hank Worden). In the course of a communal prayer in the ruined sanctuary, Crockett makes the following admission: "I brought these men down here, without askin' 'em . . . Did they want a piece of this war? . . . It's a failing of mine . . . deciding for others." A few scenes later, he delays joining Travis across the undrawn line for the last stand because he allows Tennesseans to make the final decision without his intervention. They, of course, decide to stay and fight—thereby affirming the ultimate efficacy of Crockett's deceitful manipulation of his men to bring them to Texas in the first place. This moment qualifies Travis's elitism but leaves untouched his affirmation of the political lie. I cannot fail to think of the Gulf of Tonkin, and LBJ's lying to members of Congress to get support for "deciding for others." Nor can I forget Oliver North's pride in his having lied to Congress in support of his Commander in Chief, Reagan—a good lie if the Congress is Democratic and bad if it is Republican? Wayne has affirmed this tradition of this crude art of American lying.

Other than this looming and scary element, Wayne's simple likes and dislikes deconstruct any attempt at adding to the superstructure camouflage of the corporate industrial-military complex; it reminds me of what the Frankfurt School of criticism has made clear about being oversimplistic about the correlation between

superstructure and substructure. Wayne the filmmaker demonstrates unmistakably, if ambiguously, contradictory attitudes about capitalism. As I have already mentioned, the one real villain of the film is the local Béxar capitalist, Sande. The proponent of military order and group punctilio, Travis is often shown up as a martinet. Profound instincts seemed to inspire Wayne towards suspecting the corporate effort in the West as a mere flip side of the collective effort in the East of his day. Big corporations are as repugnant to his sensibilities as big governments. Wayne's own conception of leadership—which certainly has nothing to do with the imperial style of the CEO of late-capitalistic society—entails drawing together, by the gravity of idealism, a loose aggregate of individuals that the electromagnetic repulsion of self-interest pushes apart. This dialectic between contradictory forces has been a part of the American character at least since the French aristocrat Alexis de Tocqueville made his still-definitive analysis of the peculiarly native conception of freedom which "perpetually brings men together and forces them to help one another in spite of the propensities that sever them."[18] In Brian Huberman's documentary, included with the current video version, Michael Wayne—assistant to the producer for *The Alamo*—sums up his father's affection for human diversity and dislike of the collective: "He believed in the individual, and he hated groups of people. He tried to make the Tennesseans have a certain look, but each one had a different wardrobe—you know, so it didn't look like an army, but like a group of individuals, a group who all felt the same way, but were all different." What John Wayne objects to, then, is the institutionalized control within the Army and other military organizations—the reduction of the individual to a numbered cog among many. It seems no accident that Wayne's historical exemplar, Congressman David Crockett, recommended "the abolishment of the United States Military Academy at West Point."[19]

There is, however, one kind of warfare that is resistant to fitting comfortably in any military institution: guerilla warfare. In *The Alamo* and in his other auteur glorification of the military *The Green Berets,* it is the guerilla tactics of "cut, slash, and run" that are really affirmed from any purely military point of view. It involves the sort of "knife-fighting" that Colonel Travis has such contempt for. Special Forces and their type of operation have never sat well with conventional commanders (one has only to recall Norman Schwartzkopf's not-too-secret views on his SF personnel during Desert Storm). The guerilla's main purpose is to be a subversionary creator of chaos among the enemy force, but the nature of this purpose itself is unnerving to the agents of order in his own command center. Special Forces, moreover, smack of being groups of individuals—just what Michael Wayne says his father liked. This is one of the reasons that such filmic attention is lavished on the two night raids: the first raid, to knock out a large artillery piece; the second, to alleviate a food shortage by a cattle raid. Other reasons for these night raids certainly abound. They clearly solve the already-mentioned aesthetic problem of sustaining the tremendous narrative energy demanded by an epic and still tell the Alamo story. They also allow more innovative night filming, with chiaroscuro and a natural mist over a swamp of the sort that Joseph von Sternberg would have killed for. The cattle raid begins in the night and ends in a daytime drive of the cattle across a river and through the streets of a town, which strikes me as Wayne's tribute to two memorable moments in *Red River.* Historical accuracy is served because, in one of his letters of report written during the siege, Travis seems to allude to just such a cattle raid.[20] The real reason, however, for these scenes seems to be mere indulgence in the hand-to-hand brutality of guerilla warfare—complete with an orgy of back stabbing and throat slitting, which not even Samuel Fuller had dared to match in any of his war films up to that point.

In the scene between Crockett and Flaca, by the cypress tree-lined river, rhetoric is joined with the diversity theme—love with duty. Not only the dialogue but also certain visual cues show this to be the spiritual center of the film. The power of language is celebrated when Davy Crockett speaks the following words to Flaca, when he is sending her off to join Sam Houston and Stephen Austin: "Flaca, you have an important name; you know a million words, and how they should be used. I'm sending you to fight your war: to talk up a howling mob. I'll stay here and hit a lick." The foregoing scene makes it very clear that Crockett says goodbye with a deeply felt reluctance, even though love is expressed through indirection—after the style of Howard Hawks.

His love for Flaca is expressed through the metonymy of the line, "Lord above, that's one beautiful tree," which is followed by a long take consisting of a slow tilt up, and by a bird's-eye shot slightly on the oblique, looking down through the limbs and down upon the upturned faces of the two actors.[21] This rather long moment of real poetry fits into this dialogue on life and of Crockett's awareness of the relative certainty of his approaching death. During the line, "The kind of tree Adam and Eve must'a met under," we are shown shots of significant exchanges of looks between the two

lovers. "You know somethin', Flaca? I guess I saw a who-knows-how-many trees, before I took a long thoughtful look at them. Mostly I looked at a tree to see was there a bear in it or an Indian behind it." In these lines and those that surround them, Crockett makes it clear: that he has matured to a greater level of sensibility than he has ever known before; that he has finally found a love worth living for; all adding real tragedy to the fact that he has, also, found a cause worth dying for. There are really few such deaths in Westerns; when death comes to a protagonist—like, say, the William Holden character in *The Wild Bunch*—it generally arrives as a release from hopelessness, despair, and often, old age. The scene by the river, in spite of being marred by some rather trite "a man's gotta do" tropes, does have a grandeur that lends a tragic dimension to Crockett's approaching death—coming as it does when he has the most to hope for and to lose. This scene, in short, shows him being pulled by contradictory hopes and ideals, only to succumb in the end to one.

Crockett's tragedy is also Wayne's tragedy. Wayne could not have chosen a better hero from the whole of Americana to embody his beliefs than David Crockett. Both showed a certain brilliance in self-mythologizing; each disguised a high sort of intellect behind a folksy rhetoric. The Wayne persona of the film parallels the Crockett of the quasi-autobiography that he partly authored in the 1830's: folksy superstructures combining an all-men's man with a no-man's man—of corporate macho bonding and of individualistic separatism. The parallel of the actual, historical Wayne and Crockett is even more revealing than that of the fictional personae—which they could create, but not control or keep from being manipulated by the ruthless. Think of the public Wayne performing his political monkeyshines during the Hollywood Ten days, his Alamo campaign to get Texas financing for his film, and his Vietnam era posturing as the warrior who did battle in celluloid (if never in the flesh). Then compare him with the historical Crockett as vivified in a powerful essay, "The Davy Crockett Myth," embedded in Vernon L. Parrington's classical survey of American ideas. Crockett was used by the big-monied interests, who had coalesced into the Whig party, against another backwoods poseur, also from Tennessee—President Andrew Jackson: the enemy of the protective tariff and national bank desired by the East Coast industrialists. Coonskin cap was set against coonskin cap, and David Crockett was dupe number one:

> He had become a valuable asset to the Whig party. . . . In consequence Davy soon found himself talked about. His picturesque eccentricities began to be exploited. His rugged western honesty was applauded; his shrewd backwoods intelligence was praised; his frontier humor was skillfully touched up; his characteristic motto, "go ahead," was seized upon as an expression of the progressive spirit of the lusty young Whig party. In short he was speedily turned into a myth by ways not unknown in our time, and sent forth as useful campaign material in the fight for political righteousness.

Crockett, Parrington continues, "seems never to have realized how grossly he was being exploited."[22] Nor, I suspect, did John Wayne.

The Alamo is an often beautifully, often powerfully crafted film about a myth and by a myth: aesthetically, at least, one of the finest epic films ever made; ideologically, both a tragedy and a divine comedy. Wayne's film is tragedy because of its uncanny foreboding of the thinking that got the USA into Vietnam; but it is also an often joyous celebration of American diversity in the larger sense than was acceptable to the popular media of the time. Most significantly, it offers an often penetrating analysis of how rhetoric functions—for the bad as well as for the good. What Wayne and his film deserve is what the Tennessean chorus wants—"a high-class discussion"—an open consideration of the full range of contradictions embodied in *The Alamo* and its maker. Some very diligent and talented amateurs, documentary filmmakers, as well as a crossover journalist and historians, have started the discussion on this neglected and crucial American work of art. It is now time for the academic film scholars to join the dialogic carnival.

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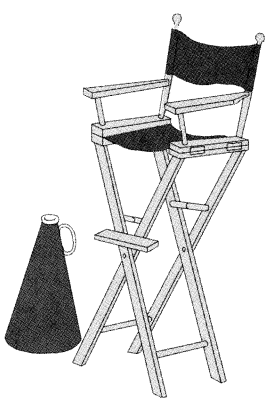
Notes

1. Randy Roberts and James S. Olson, *John Wayne: American* (New York: Simon & Schuster, Free Press, 1995), 453–79, quotation from 648.
2. Garry Wills, *John Wayne's America: The Politics of Celebrity* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 204–27.
3. Sandra Harding, *Whose Science? Whose Knowledge? Thinking from Women's Lives* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1991), 119–37, 164–87.

4. Quoted in Frank Thompson, *Alamo Movies* (East Berlin, PA: Old Mill Press, 1991), 67.
5. Stephen L. Hardin, *Texian Iliad: A Military History of the Texas Revolution* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1994), 110.
6. Wills, 207 and 342, n. 5.
7. Thompson, quotation from 71; see also Donald Clark and Christopher Andersen, *John Wayne's "The Alamo": The Making of John Wayne's 1960 Epic Film* (Hillside, Illinois: Midwest Press, R&G Productions, 1994), 1-61.
8. Oakah L. Jones, Jr., *Santa Anna* (New York: Twayne Publishing, Inc., 1968), 23.
9. Wills finds this distortion of history particularly objectionable (215).
10. Paul Andrew Hutton, "The Celluloid Alamo," *Arizona and the West* 28:1 (1986), 5–22. The quotation is from page 19. See also Don Graham, *Cowboys and Cadillacs: How Hollywood Looks at Texas* (Austin: Texas Monthly Press), 48.
11. Roberts and Olson, 456 and 469.
12. *The Frederick Douglass Papers, Series One,* ed. John W. Blassingame and John R. McKivigan, 4 vols. (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1991), 4:436.
13. Wills, 213, 223. Compared to the presentation of other women in movies around 1960, the admitted sexism with which Wayne presents women in *The Alamo* comes off very well. As a Gay, I am offended by much film being done now, let alone around 1960; however, I refuse to let this incapacitate my critical perceptions. While I am certainly not blind to who would be beyond the pale of acceptable diversity within the world of *The Alamo,* I still feel compelled to praise its inclusiveness.
14. I might say that Wayne proves far more sensitive to Spanish than Wills, who insists on spelling Flaca, "Flaka" instead—*flacola* being a good Spanish word.
15. I have derived—admittedly simplifying in the process—my conceptions of Alexander Hamilton, Thomas Jefferson, and Andrew Jackson from the first three chapters of Richard Hofstadter's *The American Political Tradition and the Men Who Made It* (New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1959), 3–67.
16. James Atkins Shackford, *David Crockett: The Man and the Legend.* Ed. John B. Schackford. Rev. ed. (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1986), 147, 162, and 167.
17. Wills is more useful on the political side of Wayne—the public figure—rather than the creative one, see 193–203, 227–33.
18. Alexis de Tocqueville, *Democracy in America,* trans. Henry Reeve et al. 2 vols. (New York: Random House, Vintage Books, 1954), 2: 111.
19. Hardin, 117.
20. William Barret Travis, Letter of 24 Feb. 1836, in *The American Reader: From Columbus to Today,* ed. Paul M. Angle (New York: Rand, 1958), 235–36.
21. Wills rightly perceives the allusion of this shot to the final shot of Raoul Walsh's *The Big Trail* and rightly sees its beauty; however, he fails to see its significances in context and he plants the impression that the shot is the sole work of "Clothier's camera" (226).
22. Vernon Louis Parrington, *Main Currents in American Thought: An Interpretation of American Literature from the Beginning to 1920,* 3 vols. (New York: Harcourt, 1927), 2:175 and 177. Although Parrington's history, as a whole, is considered dated by many contemporary Americanists primarily for theoretical and methodological reasons, I have cited him because he is factually accurate, a vivid writer, and one of the few authors of cultural history who has seriously treated the writings and the "ghostwritten" myth of Crockett.



Reviews

La Camarera del Titanic (The Chambermaid on the Titanic)

Director: Bigas Luna

Bigas Luna's *The Chambermaid on the Titanic* (*La Camarera del Titanic,* 1997) is a fascinating film dealing with the erotic power of narrative. Given its close to synchronous release with James Cameron's record-breaking blockbuster, *Titanic* (which it actually preceded), this witty French-Italian-Spanish co-production (based on a French novel by Didier Decoin and released in French with English subtitles) provides a telling comparison with Hollywood's high-tech megahit.[1] Rather than Cameron's dazzling special effects, here it is Bigas Luna's imaginative meta-narrative intricacies that drive a contrived romance to new heights of emotional giddiness and financial success (in this case, the success of the character rather than of the film). Both films use the sinking of the Titanic as the historical anchor for a fictional love story involving class conflict, a sad tale told in retrospect by the surviving lover. Both feature a young, handsome working-class hero who gains access to the luxurious liner by winning a ticket—a stroke of luck that forever changes his life. The similarities end there.

Chambermaid begins in 1912 in a foundry in Northern France where, after competing in an arduous contest of physical endurance, a young worker named Horty (Olivier Martinez) wins a ticket to witness the launching of the Titanic in Southhampton. Hoping to seduce Horty's wife Zoe (Romane Bohringer) while he is away, the owner of the ironworks factory gives him only one ticket (instead of two). During his one night at a luxurious English hotel, a beautiful young Frenchwoman named Marie (Aitana Sánchez-Gijón), who claims to be a chambermaid on the Titanic with no place to spend the night, comes to his door and asks him to give her his room. In response to this improbable request, he offers to share his suite, and she, in turn, offers to share the bed which he has gallantly relinquished to her. Although it is at first ambiguous as to whether they actually make love, in the morning he awakens alone and then rushes to the dock, arriving just in time to witness not only the launching of the luxurious ship but also the photographing of Marie on-board. When he later sees a copy of that same photograph for sale in the street, he purchases it as a souvenir. As soon as he returns home, he hears gossip about his wife having slept with the boss and then learns he has been promoted, which further arouses his suspicions. When one of his co-workers sees the photo of Marie, he urges Horty to describe his adventure. At first denying he made love to her, Horty soon begins to embellish his story with graphic sexual details that draw growing crowds of listeners at the local bar. These crowds include not only his fellow male workers but eventually also their wives whose erotic lives are increasingly affected by his sensual tales. Once news of the sinking of the Titanic reaches his town, his stories become even more compelling. Although his wife is jealous and urges him to stop, she allows him to continue because his storytelling brings more money than his hard labor had at the foundry. One night a circus showman named Zeppe (Aldo Maccione) hears his performance and persuades him to do a theatrical version with props, a melodramatic adaptation which proves even more successful than his original accounts. Then one night, a surprising event occurs (which I will not reveal here) but which changes his and our understanding of what happened that original night—an event that drives Horty to burn Marie's image and that unleashes the image of another watery death. When Horty resumes his tale, this new revision proves to be even more compelling and draws even more tears from his audience than had his earlier versions.

Like most films by Bigas Luna, *Chambermaid* focuses on an erotic obsession that narrativizes desire in a way that is transformative and potentially murderous. Yet, when compared with other works by this outrageous Catalan filmmaker, *Chambermaid*'s representations and excessiveness seem remarkably restrained. According to Bigas Luna, "The film is about imagination and too much explicitness would not have suited the tone."[2] Still, it is one of Bigas Luna's most compelling works. Peter Brooks' *Reading for the Plot* is useful here in understanding the film's power, partly because of his insistence that a story's ending and its "expansive middle" are always essential to narrative desire.

> Many of the most suggestive analysts of narrative have shared this conviction that the end writes the beginning and shapes the middle. . . . We can, then, conceive of the reading of plot as a form of desire that carries us forward, onward, through the text. Narratives both tell of desire—typically present some story of

Faces in the crowd.

> desire—and arouse and make use of desire as dynamic of signification. . . In the motors and engines I have glanced at, including Eros as motor and motor as erotic, we find representations of the dynamics of the narrative text, connecting beginning and end across the middle and making of that middle—what we read *through*—a field of force.[3]

Simply from the allusion to the Titanic in the title, we expect that *Chambermaid*'s ending will involve death by water—which helps prepare us for its antithetical opening, an extravagant montage of molten fire from the foundry that almost literally erupts on screen. Like the fiery opening of Visconti's *The Damned,* another melodrama combining historical facts with outrageous fictions, this introductory montage functions as a visual overture that establishes the symbolic register against which the narrative is to be read—a register that is at least partially anchored by the respective titles of the two movies. Whereas Visconti's infernal fires evoke the fusion of evil and lust (as well as the historical crematoriums of the Holocaust and the complicity of big industrial firms like Krupp, which survived the war with their fortunes and corruption intact), Bigas Luna's images link the volcanic eruptions of industry with a smoldering vaginal desire. The sexual associations of this extravagant imagery are as apparent as those of the gigantic testicles of the black bull billboard at the opening of Bigas Luna's internationally successful crossover film, *Jamón, jamón* (1992), only here the tone is sublime rather than satiric.[4] Yet *Chambermaid*'s extravagant hyperbole and surprising narrative twists do subsequently arouse humor but without ever undermining the film's erotic fire, which is ignited in the opening and burns full-blaze till the end. Apparently several Spanish filmmakers are skillful at achieving this difficult fusion of humor and eroticism, as we have learned from the films of Almodóvar, who was influenced by Bigas Luna.

From the opening moments of *The Chambermaid on the Titanic* we know that this narrative will forge an elemental fusion of fire and water, sex and death. The smoldering red-hot images of the opening are immediately followed by a cut to a cool grey-blue exterior, as the exhausted workers, including our impassive, tight-lipped hero, pour out of the factory into the night. This juxtaposition suggests the contrast between inner heat and exterior calm, which recurs in the opposition between the subdued hotel encounter and the wild flashbacks it spawns. The ironworks also evokes the historic context of the industrial revolution, out of which

the Titanic and its generative fantasies of class privilege and invincible capital were forged. Against this muted landscape we hear the film's first narrative murmurs: fragments of proletarian gossip about alleged acts of cuckoldry,which reveal how the workers' longing for power is displaced onto the sexual realm and how it genders the foundry's smoldering fires female. As Linda Williams pointed out in her seminal essay on "Body Genres,"

> Even when the pleasure of viewing has traditionally been constructed for masculine spectators, as is the case in most traditional heterosexual pornography, it is the female body in the grips of an out-of-control ecstasy that has offered the most sensational sight . . . It is thus through what Foucault has called the sexual saturation of the female body that audiences of all sorts have received some of their most powerful sensations.[5]

This dynamic helps explain the hunger felt by these disempowered men for Horty's erotic tales of the ecstatic chambermaid's insatiable appetite and of his own sexual prowess ("Twelve times in one night!" his admiring listeners exclaim)—a prowess they had already witnessed in his winning performance during the grueling contest of physical endurance. The desire and capacity for endurance are easily transposed to the narrative, which generates new prolific variations that keep expanding the middle—a "field of force" that is also gendered female like the fire.

The "expansive middle" of the narrative extends desire by presenting a series of erotic representations of Marie's body and thereby forestalling her premature death. According to Brooks, "The complication of the detour is related to the danger of short-circuit: the danger of reaching the end too quickly, of achieving the im-proper death." (103–104) This expansive middle also underscores the pun in the English possessive form of Horty's name (whore-tease). For, not only does he withhold himself sexually from Marie in London, but like Shahrazad he uses his fictional heroine to tease his narratees with small doses of pleasure and thereby ensures the survival of his honor if not his life. Brooks' description of the "metaseductive" *Thousand and One Nights* (what he calls "the story of stories") could also apply to *Chambermaid* (only with Horty doubling as both clever narrator and troubled narratee):

> Shahrazad's storytelling takes a desire that has gone off the rails—the Sultan's desire, derailed by his wife's infidelity . . . and cures it by prolonging it, precisely by narrativizing it. . . Narration, in this allegory, is seen to be life-giving in that it arouses and sustains desire, ensuring that the terminus it both delays and beckons toward will offer what we might call a lucid repose, desire both come to rest and set in perspective (60–61).

As Horty reawakens desire in his downtrodden fellow-workers, he simultaneously heals the wounds suffered by his own male honor over the scandals concerning his wife (yet it is equally possible that his jealousy is merely staged to alleviate his own guilt over his adulterous fantasies about Marie). At a pivotal point in the film he stands perched on the factory tower, as if contemplating a melodramatic suicide, but then throws a wrench down at his boss. It conveniently falls short and merely breaks the windshield of his boss's luxurious car, resulting in Horty's being fired. Yet this abortive performance of Promethean revolt succeeds in freeing him to commit himself to his "true" calling as storyteller. Thus, in many ways the compelling power of his stories is based on lack—his audience's lack of power, his own lack of a job, his lack of sexual fulfillment with Marie, his lack of effective follow-through as an action hero, and (by extension) the film's lack of sexual explicitness in what is represented on screen. Speaking as a Catalan filmmaker who grew up under Francoist repression, Bigas Luna describes the film as:

> the story of the birth of a great storyteller . . . Telling lies is the very essence of the creative process, Horty himself lives out his inventions and transforms those around him to survive and escape a reality he can no longer bear . . . Creation [is] often born from a constraint. Total liberty is not very good for creativity.[6]

The expansive middle of the narrative also serves *our* pleasure. Given that we already know the Titanic will sink and most of its passengers and staff will die, the narrative must seek alternative hermeneutic questions to arouse and sustain our curiosity and desire. To solve this problem, Bigas Luna turns our attention to ellipses—those gaping holes in the narrative into which a profuse number of imaginative elaborations, hyperbolic variations, and lurching reversals can be inserted.

The first blatant ellipsis occurs in the hotel room. As the two beautiful young strangers lie quietly side by side in bed, there is a brief dissolve to a fleeting image of their making love. We are left wondering: is

it a dream or did it really happen? Before we can answer, we see Horty awakening alone in bed, then hurriedly dressing and rushing to the dock. We do not know what happened in that gap between the dreamlike dissolve and his abrupt awakening, which is precisely where Horty positions his first elaborate stories.

The most blatant ellipsis occurs during the break in one of Horty's theatrical performances, a rupture which draws hisses and boos from the bourgeois audience and a young juggler on stage to fill the interlude. This interruption imposes seriality onto the theater, turning his story into a "cliff-hanger"—a narrative strategy that is more commonly found in other forms of melodrama (in literature, movies, and television). During that interlude, surprising events occur off stage (but not off-screen) which are adapted to the dramatic narrative once his performance resumes. But it is obvious that other elaborations could just as easily have been inserted into this gap. Once Horty returns to the stage, the story of Marie is reborn like a phoenix out of the flames of her burning photo, which is an enlargement of the "original" reproduction. During this performance we realize that it is not the woman, man, or their actions that are inherently erotic, but rather their narrativization. The film shows us that desire is driven by narrative and, conversely, narrative is driven by desire—whether it is an erotic scenario performed for (or with) others, or a private fantasy used to mobilize bodily sensations and perceptions for one's own sexual climax. As Brooks puts it, "Desire as narrative thematic, desire as narrative motor, and desire as the very intention of narrative language and the act of telling all seem to stand in close interrelation."(54)

These two blatant ellipses in *Chambermaid* lead us to rethink all of the seams of the narrative, and as soon as we do this, the whole narrative fabric begins to unravel as a total fabrication. It is no longer merely a question of whether Horty actually made love to Marie, for a whole series of questions come to mind concerning the improbabilities of this narrative, each moving us further backward toward the beginning: Did he really become rich and famous as an actor and storyteller by telling this one story? Did she really come to his hotel room and ask him, a total stranger, to give it up to her? Did he really stay at that elegant hotel, supposedly the best in London? Did he ever go to England or win the ticket, or were these ideas sparked by his wife's fantasy of a special prize that might enable them to get away together for a brief holiday? Did he ever win that contest of physical endurance not just once but three years in a row, the proverbial number that triggers the magical event in fairy tales? Did he fantasize the whole narrative as he lay in the warm bath while his wife Zoe diligently scrubbed his body, speculating that those red marks on his flesh must have come from his having gotten too close to the fire? Or did the fantasy begin with the opening montage, a fantasy framed by fire and water—the molten iron begetting the burning image of Marie, just as the warm bath begets the icy sea in which the Titanic disappeared and the later scenes of sex and death at the water's edge?

The verisimilitude of the story seems to hinge only on two things: the sinking of the Titanic, which is an historical fact, and the photo of the chambermaid, a souvenir which is the only tangible evidence of their encounter. Yet both are treated in the story primarily as commodified visual spectacle—desirable objects to be seen rather than ridden. On the docks, the luxury liner is merely a pretty image looked at from afar; like the chambermaid, this narrative vehicle is entered and intimately explored only within the erotic flashbacks. For, Horty's winning ticket grants him not passage on the Titanic but merely an opportunity to witness its launching, and his night with Marie enables him to conquer not her body but her image.

Marie's photo is the germinal image for Horty's fantasies and those of his narratees, for it first arouses their interest and expectations. Not only is this haunting image reproduced and enlarged in the theater, but his wife Zoe begins to simulate and embody it. Marie's image becomes fetishized like the various erotic mementos in Bigas Luna's earlier film, *Bilbao* (1978).[7] But ironically here, this photo also raises doubts about the story's authenticity. Was Marie ever really a chambermaid on the Titanic or were her costume and story merely part of a masquerade? And if so, then how could her photograph have been taken on the ship? And even if it were, how would its reproduction appear so quickly on the streets? And how coincidental that he would immediately be able to find it. So ironically the photo becomes a contradictory sign of both the story's authenticity and its contrivance.

Similarly, it may be our prior knowledge of the Titanic's sinking that makes this story and the character of Marie sound more like an erotic fantasy. The mere coupling of the chambermaid and the Titanic in the film's title already begins to eroticize class conflict, for it evokes fantasies of dangerous servitude in the lap of luxury. Moreover, a sexual adventure with a chambermaid is a well-known sub-genre of porn, and pornography doggedly recurs throughout the work of Bigas Luna, usually driven by fantasies of sex and death.

This structure of an unraveling narrative can also be found in Buñuel's *Belle de jour* and in Bigas Luna's

Horty (Olivier Martinez) and Marie (Aitana Sánchez-Gijón) as the lovers in *La Camarera del Titanic*.

own earlier masterpiece, *Bilbao*.[8] Both of these films share with *Chambermaid* a similar slippage across genres—from pornography, to melodrama, to meta-narrative—and an implicit concern with class issues that gives these texts some grounding in everyday social reality. The close relationship between pornography and melodrama has been noted by Linda Williams in her essay on "body genres." After citing Laplanche and Pontalis's claim that "fantasy is not so much a narrative that enacts the quest for an object of desire as it is a setting for desire," she argues:

> Because these genres display fewer fantastic special effects and because they rely on certain conventions of realism—the activation of social problems in melodrama, the representation of real sexual acts in pornography—they seem less obviously fantastic. Yet the usual criticisms that these forms are improbable, that they lack psychological complexity and narrative closure, and that they are repetitious, become moot as evaluation if such features are intrinsic to their engagement with fantasy.[9]

Like *Bilbao* and *Belle de jour, Chambermaid* implies that this fusion of pornography and melodrama and their common root in erotic fantasy lie at the heart of *all* narrative. In the film's most passionate sequence, Horty pushes one of his fingers into Marie's mouth, and she rubs his sensual lips in response. Both acts are represented in huge eroticized close-ups, fetishizing the mouth as the most important erogenous zone in this film about storytelling. In another sex scene, where the couple makes passionate love on the Titanic under an elegant banquet table on which a lavish meal is being prepared for the elite first-class passengers, the class conflict is clearly part of the turn-on. In another erotic scene particularly beloved by his audience, Horty describes how he sprayed Marie's body with expensive champagne, and the image momentarily simulates both a "golden shower" and ejaculation (what Williams calls the classic "money shot" in movie and video porn).[10] The mere fact that some listeners (including his wife) are eager to reenact the scene testifies to its success. For, "The success of these genres is often measured by the degree to which the audience sensation mimics what is seen."[11] Yet, here this vicarious sensation acquires a class dimension, for the luxury liner and posh hotel prove ideal "settings for desire" for both the proletarian listeners savoring the pornographic tales at the local bar and the middle-class spectators watching their adaptation to melodrama in the theater.

In *Chambermaid* this movement across narrative genres (from gossip, lies, and dirty jokes, to bawdy fabliaux, to pornography, to serial melodrama, to intellectual meta-narrative) is accompanied by a similar movement across media: from private fantasy, to ordinary conversation, to oral recitation, to theatrical performance, to the novel and its adaptation to the screen. Partly as a result of this chain of adaptations across media, we are able to see Cameron's Hollywood blockbuster—like the Titanic itself, with all of their conspicuous consumption—as obscene. Bigas Luna claims the Titanic "is the symbol of a century going under . . . our sombre epoch sinking. Maybe culture itself is soon going to disappear swallowed up by the enormous media monster. And to survive the only thing we'll have left is our imagination. That's the message of the film."[12]

From this perspective, Cameron's dazzling special effects appear to be merely an elaboration of the theatrical gimmickry that was tacked on to Horty's tales and the heart of the movie's success seems similarly to lie in the melodramatic loss of the lover. For, this is the emotional anchor that survives across divisions of genre, media, class, and culture and that drives those passionate Leonardo DiCaprio fans (like Horty's avid listeners) to keep returning to the theater for more. This is hardly big news. Yet perhaps more surprising, *Chambermaid* enables us to see that Cameron's lavish technological extravagance (like Horty's expensive champagne and luxurious settings) as well as his trappings of class conflict are used merely to eroticize a simple tale of romantic conquest—a point that gives more ironic resonance to DiCaprio's celebrated line which Cameron echoed at the Oscars: "I'm King of the World!" I do not mean to suggest that Bigas Luna's film is more "sincere" in its sentiments, for the narrative's emotional hook and its earnest class-based context are deconstructed along with the gimmickry through the playful contrivance of *Chambermaid*'s flashback structure, which is driven not by romantic nostalgia (as in *Titanic*) but by a frank desire to salvage one's losses for profit and pleasure. The final irony is that, following in the wake of Hollywood's record-breaking *Titanic,* Bigas Luna's robust narrative vehicle might well prove unsinkable in the global market, despite all its ingenious unravellings.

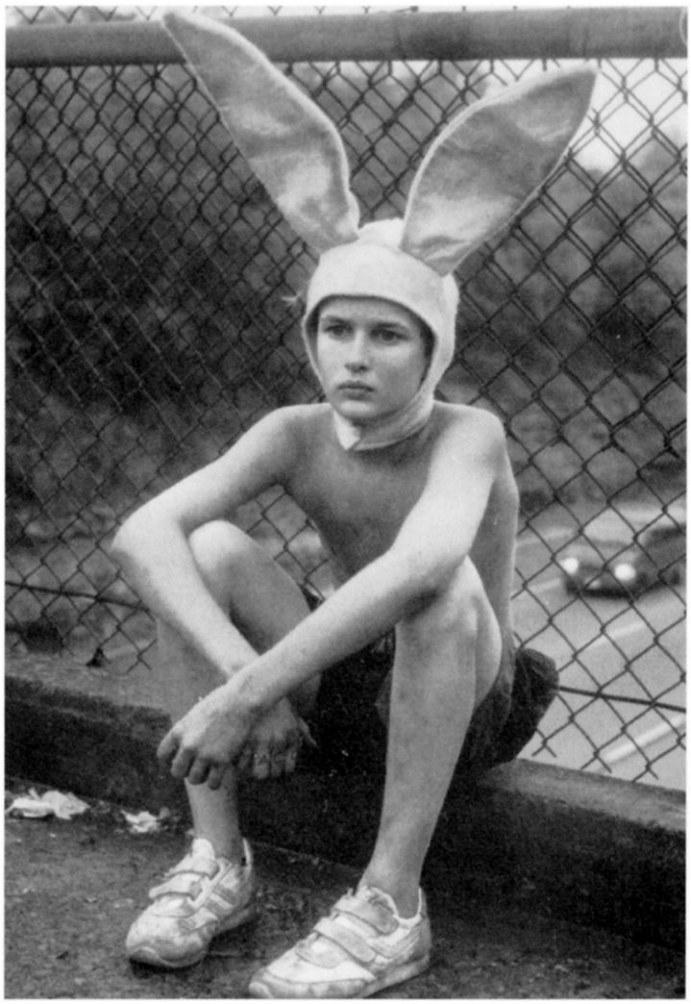
Marsha Kinder is professor of critical studies at the USC School of Cinema-TV. Her most recent books on Spanish cinema include *Blood Cinema,* with a companion CD-ROM; *Refiguring Spain: Cinema/Media/Culture;* and *Luis Buñuel's "The Discreet Charm of the Bourgeoisie."* As director of The Labyrinth Project, a three-year initiative on interactive narative funded by the Annenberg Center for communication, she is hosting an international conference and installation exhibit titled "Interactive Frictions" in June 1999.

Notes

1. For a perceptive discussion of Bigas Luna's approach to transnational filmmaking, see Marvin D'Lugo's essay, "*La teta i la lluna:* The Form of Transnational Cinema in Spain," *Refiguring Spain: Cinema/Media/Representation,* ed. Marsha Kinder (Durham and London: Duke University Press, 1997), 196–214. D'Lugo argues that the trilogy of Bigas Luna films that preceded *Chambermaid* all "are pointedly cast within the reordered commercial space of transnational European cinema."(200)
2. Quoted in an interview contained within the film's press kit, 5.
3. Peter Brooks, *Reading for the Plot: Design and Intention in Narrative* (New York: Vintage, 1984), 22, 37, 47.
4. For a discussion of this film, see my review, "Jamón, jamón" in *Film Quarterly* 47, no. 1 (1993), 30–35.
5. Linda Williams, "Film Bodies: Gender, Genre, and Excess," *Film Quarterly* 44, no. 4 (1991), 4.
6. Press kit, 2, 4.
7. According to Bigas Luna, "At the beginning, she [Aitana Sánchez-Gijón] couldn't do the film. But I kept a photo of her on me. I'm slightly fetishistic with photos, a bit like Horty with Marie's." Press kit, 5.
8. For an extended discussion of this film, see my book *Blood Cinema: The Reconstruction of National Identity in Spain* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1993), 262–275.
9. Linda Williams, "Film Bodies," 10.
10. See Linda Williams, *Hardcore: Power, Pleasure, and the "Frenzy of the Visible,"* (Berkeley, Los Angeles, London: University of California Press, 1989).
11. Williams, "Film Bodies," 4–5.
12. Press kit, 4.

Gummo

Director: Harmony Korine. Producer: Cary Woods. Writer: Harmony Korine. Cinematographer: Jean Yves Escoffier. Music Supervisor: Randall Poster. Fine Line Features.



Jacob Sewell as Bunny Boy in *Gummo.*

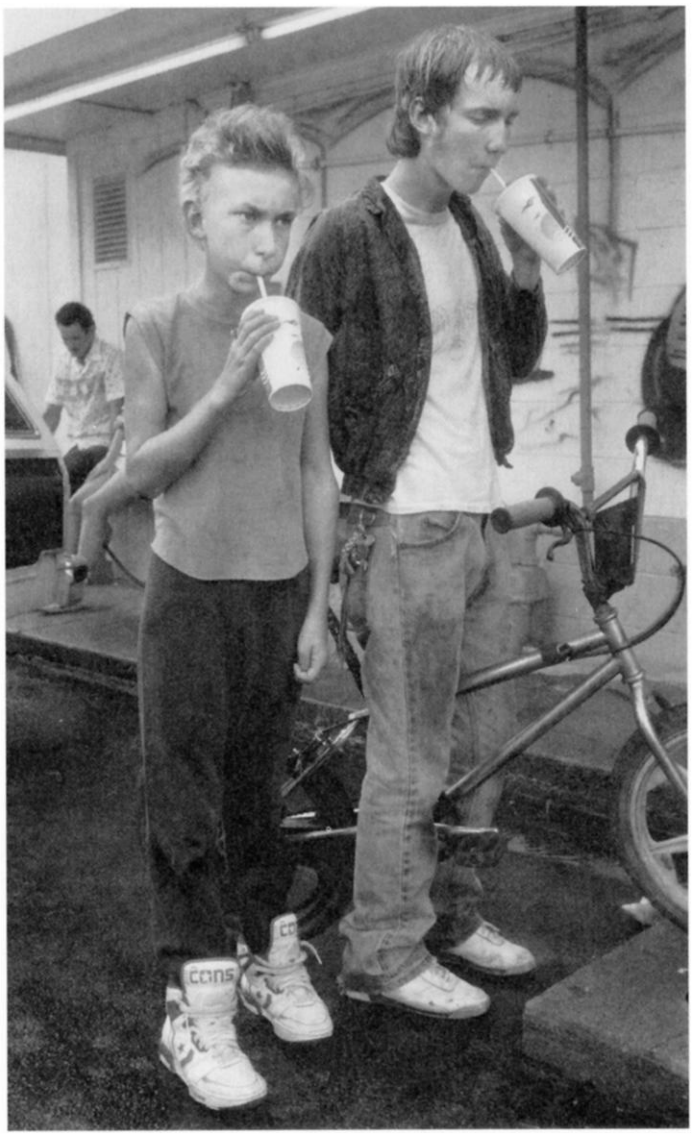
Breathtaking and creepy, Harmony Korine's *Gummo* is one of the few truly risk-taking independent films of recent years. The debut film from the 23-year-old Korine, *Gummo* offers the kind of nasty truthfulness more often seen in the esoteric, documentarian work of British photographer Richard Billingham's images of his alcoholic, ruined family members, Jim Goldberg's journalistic portraits of homeless teens captured in a photography exhibit and book, *Raised By Wolves,* or the devastating child-murder documentary *Paradise Lost.* Korine's population of the film with friends from his own Nashville upbringing lends a further verité element which grounds *Gummo* in a personal documentary tradition in keeping with the autobiographical photography of his benefactor Larry Clark, Billingham, Nan Goldin and their progenitor, Diane Arbus.

Gummo opens with distorted video footage of a stretch of Hell known as Xenia, Ohio devastated as if by demonic or angelic intervention by a vengeful tornado, a catatonic child's voice narrating the destruction like some fairy tale waif. By the film's end, one can appreciate—even invite—the twisted worldview that could support both satan worship and the religious belief in the righteousness of a tornado wiping this sorry place off the face of the Earth.

Gummo's is a world de-populated of grown-ups. Their very absence is attested to in the blank generation they have spawned. Hanging out on concrete slab front porches, shooting cats full of BBs, sniffing glue, sustaining themselves with meals of corndogs and milkshakes, *Gummo*'s monstrous, tragic children play in the shade of their diseased family trees. Having fun, getting high, wasting time, their rage and desperation to express or get affection comes out warped into sadism or self-abuse, their pleasures greedily horded with animalistic intensity.

Korine made his breakthrough into film by writing photographer Larry Clark's *Kids,* but Korine is already years ahead of his guru. An intuitive, self-taught filmmaker, Korine bucks the current tradition of Scorsese- and Tarantino-indoctrinated film grads who recycle ad infinitum the road films and caper violence of an addled modern imagination. Instead, Korine uniquely envisions the ugliness and pain of a subculture of abandoned kids; skinheads, deviants, perverts, sluts, victims all, with sickening accuracy and a sympathetic delicacy *Kids* never achieved. *Gummo*'s children are free agents. A condition once romanticized in the verdant, unencumbered child's paradise of *Huckleberry Finn,* in *Gummo* such freedom has lapsed into an unromantic parental abandonment of children to Satanic cults and junkyards and sexual abuse.

Korine shows how every perversion in *Gummo,* like the older boy (Max Perlich) who pimps his retarded sister to best pals Solomon (Jacob Reynolds) and Tummler (Nick Sutton), is relativized by environment. With no standards to measure sociopathy next to—where adults are drunkards, rapists, pornographers, jailbirds, mad—these kids become, by process of elimination, the prophets and heroes. In *Gummo*'s wire-crossed circuitry of powerlines, child molesters, cancer and retardation, Korine weaves a nightmare fairy tale of a poisoned world eating up its inhabitants from the guts out. The trampy teenage sisters Dot (Chloe



Solomon (Jacob Reynolds) and Tummler (Nick Sutton).

Sevigny) and Helen (Carisa Bara), who shave their eyebrows and strip their hair of color, suggest little girl sexuality defined by exposure to porn and incest, and sexual imaginations steeped in artifice, pain and fetishism. The boys and even grown men of *Gummo* operate within the same twisted notion of gender roles. Masculinity in *Gummo* is unnaturally brutal, whether seen in the gladiatorial men fighting a kitchen dinette set in one of the film's most disturbing and amusing moments, or in the angry, vicious homoerotic love expressed between two wrestling skinhead brothers.

Every aspect of *Gummo* feels polluted, from the boy who dresses in nothing but shorts and pink rabbit ears (Jacob Sewell) to the budding serial killers—yet another caricature of masculine aggression—who play-torture Bunny Boy. Everything is permissible, Korine shrugs, the most grotesque psychological damage worn as silly costume. And the most disturbing element of *Gummo* may be the impression it gives, that Korine didn't have to coax such brutal vignettes from his "actors"—that what he's done in this spellbinding film is capture the reality of his white trash roots in a new form. Korine has capped the mason-jar lid on these raging, helpless moths so we can watch their struggles behind the clouded glass. Using found footage, a verité style mixed with unnervingly distorted imagery, Korine employs technique as Francis Bacon's paint evoked tissue and blood, as yet another indication of his thematic sickness. Blurring out characters' faces or fluttering hysterically around them like a swarming insect, Korine slices the world up, making its people into monsters so that the only truth can seem fleeting and dreamlike: Did it happen, or did we just dream it after a huffing binge? Typical of *Gummo*'s fog of chemically and genetically distorted minds, is a vignette of a sad-eyed little girl playing in the mud, as her voice-over narration recounts her molestation at the hands of her stepfather. *Gummo* is a toxic swamp of such lacerating truth and the erratic behavior, tics, sadism, rage that distorts it into a dreamy, fuzzy unreality. This impression of a nightmare wrapped in the trappings of a children's fairy tale powerfully conveys Korine's view—that as much as its children beat against the glass, they are unable to escape, trapped within the viciousness and horrors their parents have visited upon them.

Korine's technique is a skin-crawling and electric assault on the eyes and brain, which disorients as much as the vignette-based, non-linear format of *Gummo,* alighting on one character, only to jump to another, and shattering filmic time and space in a disorienting way. The largely negative response to *Gummo,* trickled down from *The New York Times* reviewer Janet Maslin's definitively repulsed reaction, suggests an objection to style equally balanced by objections to *Gummo*'s disturbing subject matter. Maslin's effusive, hysterical pronouncement of Clark's *Kids* "a wake-up call to the world," typifies how its more traditional narrative approach, adult perspective and the faux-moralizing of Clark's AIDS warning is more palpable to audiences. Korine refuses to sift out such moral lessons from *Gummo*'s chaos.

As Gus Van Sant noted of the film's unusual vantage, *Gummo* is "made by a young person speaking through a sophisticated and refined cinematic dialogue of modern cultural influences." What's more, Korine's failure to latch this story onto one character's consistent viewpoint alienates and fractures our response to

the film, a unique strategy for conveying the disorienting, centerless amorality of the world he documents. To center a film on one protagonist is to buy into a classical Hollywood schemata invested in America's self-identity; of heroism, of objectives ultimately rewarded, of authority, which it is Korine's goal to shatter. These children grow up in a world with no such heroes, no parents, no authority, and to yoke a film to such a concept would therefore be disingenuous.

In an *Interview* magazine discussion with the filmmaker, Werner Herzog likens *Gummo* to a science fiction film; "a scary vision of the future: a loss of soul, a loss of spirituality." *Gummo* offers a poisoned glimpse of the Apocalypse, of a world where a decayed moral center allows incest, violence, self-abuse and neglect to flourish. The essence of this psychological deterioration is reflected in the clutter of these characters' homes and their yards where objects are horded into piles of filthy debris, and children are thrown away. The small instances of tenderness between Solomon and his alcoholic mother (Linda Manz) thus occur in a claustrophobic house whose clutter squashes such frail expressions of love. By the same token, a scene of a little boy lifting a picture from his living room wall to uncover a colony of roaches and the insect bites which pock his legs somehow speak more profoundly for the familial cesspool which is illustrated more clearly in his zoned-out mother sniffing glue on their couch.

Korine's casting decisions in *Gummo* capitalize on this atmosphere of disorder, his characters gleaned from the authentic flotsam of a diseased consumer culture. Paint sniffer Nick Sutton captured Korine's imagination on an episode of the Sally Jesse Raphael show titled with the tabloid screech "My Child Died From Sniffing Paint," and found his titular star Jacob Reynolds in a Dunkin' Donuts commercial.

Where *Gummo* stumbles is in its literalization of Xenia's freakishness: a black midget, a deaf couple arguing in sign language, a horny albino girl, who become overly symbolic signposts leading to Korine's assertion that this viciously constricted, impoverished town has made its occupants in vitro victims of its moral contamination, pickled in the sins of their parents. In a world where degradation is commonplace, Korine suggests such evil is tangible, like some poison leached into the soil to deform the locales, or literalized as a vengeful tornado which erases sin with a mythic fury.

Felicia Feaster is a freelance writer living in Atlanta, Georgia.

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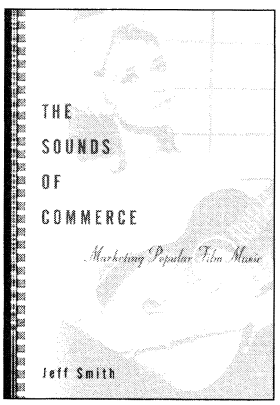

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Grace McKenna (Jennifer Lopez) tries to convince Bobby Cooper (Sean Penn) to kill her husband.

U-Turn

Director: Oliver Stone. Producers: Clayton Townsend, Dan Halsted. Cinematographer: Robert Richardson. Editors: Hank Corwin, Thomas J. Nordberg. Music: Ennio Morricone. Tristar Pictures.

Among A-list Hollywood directors working today, nobody creates deeper fault lines between admirers and detractors more than Oliver Stone. While working within the Hollywood system, Stone has been able to produce a provocative and controversial body of work unrivaled in its ability to aggressively challenge American audiences to critically evaluate their social and political institutions. Although his position within the Hollywood community has been validated by three Academy Awards, he has maintained his status as a maverick by consistently taking risks. Stone's admirers consider him a courageous filmmaker who engages important historical subjects from a personal, and frequently left-wing, perspective. His detractors label him a paranoid and propagandist who uses the powerful medium of film to push a distorted view of recent events in American history. Thus, Stone has become cemented in the collective American consciousness as being primarily an issues oriented and historical filmmaker with a slightly subversive take on the American establishment.

It is a pity that *U-Turn,* Oliver Stone's highest aesthetic achievement to date, appears at a time when the director has become locked in an image as a political radical. *U-Turn,* a purely fictional story adapted from John Ridley's novel *Stray Dogs,* represents a conscious and much welcome strategic retreat from political controversy. Unfortunately, the film stands little chance of being appraised on its own merits. The film has lamentably not received its just recognition for two reasons. The accumulated hostility and pent up bad feeling against Stone among those who find his portrait of the United States to be fundamentally anti-American makes any picture he releases anathema and subject to a whole host of dismissive prejudgments and general indifference, if not ridicule. Among Stone's supporters—who view him as a daring and outspoken filmmaker and enjoy his agitprop approach to cinema—a fictional film that is devoid of political content and not sufficiently engaged is at serious risk of reduced box office receipts by failing to deliver his signature degree of political commitment.

While the name Oliver Stone has become fixed in the public consciousness with a didactic brand of political cinema, the frequent uproars and persistent controversies that greet his work have overshadowed the fact that he has evolved into an exceptional visual artist

with an inventive vocabulary of powerful images and cinematic techniques. In many respects *U-Turn* reveals what Stone's career could have been had he taken an alternative route, taking a detour around the political disputes and fierce attacks that have marked his course through the film world.

U-Turn is an adventure in genre fusion. It is Stone's approach to film as an entertainment without political pretensions. It is pure story with no social or political agenda. The film can best be characterized as a Spaghetti Noir taking its inspiration from the tradition of Hollywood Westerns—with a salute to the stylistic innovations and European sense of sophistication Sergio Leone brought to that genre—and *film noir.* The film takes its title from the reversals, ping-pong shifts of advantage, or u-turns that swing the plot and are the picture's primary narrative theme. Stone has characterized the story as "scorpions in a bucket" to describe the double-crossing, dissembling, and debauchery at the center of the moral universe of the main characters. For the characters that inhabit *U-Turn,* Stone draws upon archetypes—like the drifter, the sheriff, and the *femme fatale*—of the Western and *film noir* genres as ingredients in his spaghetti-noir sauce.

U-Turn is the story of Bobby Cooper (Sean Penn), a feckless pill-popping gambler with a bag full of dollars in transit to Las Vegas to pay off outstanding debts to a menacing band of Russian bookmakers. One sweltering hot day he strays into Superior, Arizona, a dusty southwestern town even more corrupt than he is. He rides into town in a Mustang—a red 1964 Ford Mustang—which needs to have a busted radiator hose repaired before he can get back on the road. Bobby, a man who has obviously seen the world, approaches this hick town with all the arrogance and condescension of one of Howard Hawk's heroes, but over the next twenty-four hours Superior humbles this worldly stranger. With steam shooting from beneath the Mustang's hood, Bobby pulls into Harlan's garage, where the bumbling grease monkey mechanic Darrell (Billy Bob Thornton) exploits the stranded motorist's predicament to the hilt. After being given an exorbitant estimate for the routine repair of a radiator hose, Bobby wanders into town to wet his whistle and get a bite to eat. Almost immediately Bobby is bombarded by a bizarre set of people, situations and circumstances that conspire to thwart his effort to return to Vegas to retire his gambling debts. While waiting for his car to be repaired, he becomes infatuated with Grace McKenna (Jennifer Lopez) and gives the coy Apache seductress all his best Bogart lines. Here is where it all goes wrong. Grace fails to mention that she is married to Jake, a much older real estate developer, who walks in on the pair just in time to prevent being cuckolded. Once ensnared in this sordid love circle, Bobby's completely desperate situation gets him reluctantly involved in a few hastily devised subplots of murder for hire. Through all the twists and turns of the plot we are introduced to the quirky inhabitants of Superior, until Bobby embarks on his final chance for escape.

U-Turn is a departure for Stone in several ways. For one, it is definitely the most humorous picture he has made. Although the dark satire of *Natural Born Killers* provided several uproarious moments, the comic scenes of *U-Turn* achieve a wacky and almost slapstick level of hilarity. The series of close calls and near misses, taunts and frustrations, outrages and surprising twists of fate give the film a cartoonish type of lunacy. The extreme set of circumstances and corrupt world of Superior provide the film with several opportunities for twisted visual gags, razor sharp zingers, and gut busting black humor.

Another difference is that Stone is working on a much more manageable scale. In a way, it marks a return to the tight budgets and guerrilla style of filmmaking that first brought Stone to prominence as a director. The monumental scale and sprawling storylines of his historical and biographical pictures made it exceedingly difficult for Stone to cash-out with a satisfactory dramatic effect. The big budgets led to compromises in which Stone had to cast big stars more for their box office bankability than their suitability for the role. *U-Turn*'s smaller scale enables Stone to compress the storyline into a much faster tempo that gives the film an exciting feeling of urgency. In contrast to the indeterminate conclusions of his grand historical films, the viewer receives the extraordinary twists of plot with a sense of confidence that the director is in complete command of the narrative and the story ends on a gratifying note of ironic resolution.

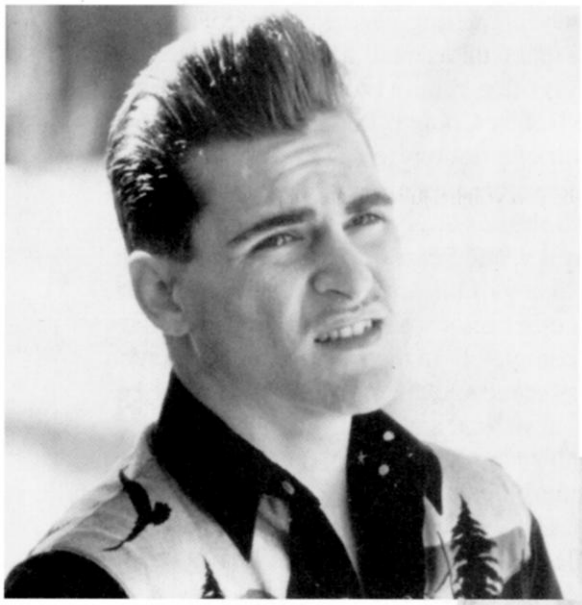
U-Turn, more than any of Stone's others, is told with extraordinary skill in images. In contrast to his epics, Stone has managed to compress a long story into conventional feature length time through the thrifty use of images in a visual shorthand. He makes deft use of time-lapse of photography, reprises beautiful images, and zooms in on key details (like a knowing glance between Grace and Sheriff Potter, her surreptitious lover). Superior's nuances are established quickly in montage shots that give the viewer a sense of the tedium of life in this isolated backwater. Like many of his other pictures, its style is direct and assaultive but Stone has come a long way since the clumsy voice over letter narrative of *Platoon,* and *U-Turn* demonstrates a much

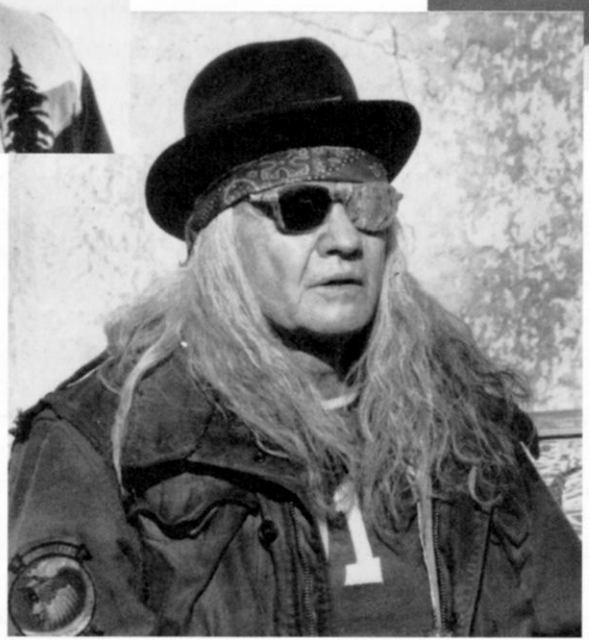
From left, Claire Danes, Billy Bob Thornton, Joaquin Phoenix, Jon Voight, Julie Hagerty.

greater measure of subtlety. Perhaps being freed from the burden of screen-writing enabled Stone to give full flight to his visual imagination and pour all his energies into set-ups, frame composition, camera angles, symbolism, and detailed attention to the overall atmospherics of the film.

A large part of the credit for the visual splendor of the picture has to be given to the outstanding cinematography of Stone's long-time collaborator Robert Richardson. From the opening aerial shot of Bobby's speeding Mustang leaving a trail of dust along a deserted dirt road until the closing credit panorama shot of the majestic red rocks mountain range, Richardson's camera work takes full advantage of the poetic landscapes of *U-Turn*'s locale in the great American Southwest. The picture was shot primarily in color on high contrast Kodak reversal film stock that gives *U-Turn* a wild rough-and-tumble look with overexposed grainy visuals. The high contrast quality and overexposure that are peculiar to reversal film stock captures perfectly the sweltering Arizona heat and absorbs the rich primary colors of Victor Kempster's exquisite production design. The filmmakers' vivid color palette of blazing reds, bright pinks, sandy yellows, and aquamarine facilitates the narrative's rapid shifts in emotional tone from muted naturalism to hallucinogenic dream states. Stone's experiments in style and pioneering juxtaposition of video with different film stocks—particularly in *JFK* and *Natural Born Killers*—did not go unnoticed by acute observers, but in *U-Turn* form serves function better than in any of his previous films.

The camerawork of *U-Turn* illustrates precisely how the aesthetic qualities and technique of the film animate the themes and story of the picture. The open-





ing sequences of the movie are filmed primarily with a handheld 16mm camera that provides *U-Turn* with a Godardian rapid tempo and nervous energy that depicts with near perfection the protagonist's disoriented state of mind upon entering the strange small universe of Superior. What is dazzling about Stone's films since *Natural Born Killers* is how he utilizes camerawork, editing, soundtrack, and contrasting film stocks to build composite images that communicate the interior thoughts, subjective experiences, and differing levels of consciousness of the characters. When Bobby experiences psychic jolts during his constant travails, Stone chooses distorted multiple exposure images, and ruptures between image and sound to convey information about the protagonist's emotional distress. This technique is used most brilliantly when expressing the antagonistic relationship between Bobby and the comically grotesque mechanic Darrell. When Bobby is driven over the edge by Darrell's escalating demands of payment for routine repairs and unauthorized work, an image of Bobby's gun—which he has locked in the trunk of his Mustang—flashes on the screen to depict his murderous intent. When the advantage shifts to Darrell, a character that appears more stupid than he is, we see a frontal portrait shot of the filthy and inept mechanic laughing in Bobby's face. In the film's unhappy ending, as Bobby's last tumble of the dice turns to disaster, Stone's camera shows us the triumphant grin of Darrel in Bobby's final moment of despair. The break in correspondence between auditory and visual sensations is one of Stone's most imaginative innovations. The overall aesthetic sensibility of the film is hallucinogenic as told from the subjective point of view of the drug tripping protagonist. This mood and altered

state of perception is illustrated best in the hypnotic scene between Bobby and Grace on the edge of precipice. As Bobby summons up the courage to carry out the murder for hire he has planned with Jake and push Grace over the edge, Stone prolongs our suspense with quick cross cutting and a sweeping aerial shot that flies above the two figures within the sublime beauty of the Arizona canyons. The music, natural sounds, and powerful images all work to intensify Bobby's hightened sense of emotion and delusional state of mind.

Although the betrayals of trust and treacherous subplots of the story are derived from classic *film noir* tropes, the film's visual style is inspired by the aesthetic sensibility of Sergio Leone's Spaghetti Western. From the visual vocabulary of Leone's pioneering approach to the Western genre, Stone makes frequent use of giant close-ups of the main characters' eyes and lips, and he shoots his hero on a solitary walk against the sky of the desert horizon. Bobby, much like the Clint Eastwood hero of Leone's *Fistful of Dollars* trilogy, acts out of the single motivation of financial gain.

The affinity with the Spaghetti Western is most evident in Ennio Morricone's score and soundtrack for the film. Morricone was, or course, one of Leone's most important collaborators. The soundtrack of country and western popular tunes and Morricone's haunting compositions contributes more to the emotional power and ambiance of the picture than any of the music in Stone's previous films, with the possible exception French *nouveau vague* composer Georges Dellerue's work on *Salvador.* The music in *U-Turn* assumes multiple functions with striking results. The C & W songs reinforce place and setting, and the abrupt sonic burst of the music heightens the jarring effect of the stop-and-start internal rhythms of the film. Nothing illustrates this technique better than the robbery scene at the Groceria. When Bobby has the misfortune to be caught up in an armed robbery at the local grocery store, the old lady who owns the place whips out a shotgun and guns down the fleeing criminals. As she blast the robbers, who are attempting to abscond with Bobby's bag of money, her bullets inadvertently shred Bobby's C notes into confetti. At the moment the bills fly into a thousand pieces, Stone uses contrapuntally romantic music and slow motion photography to abruptly shift from the tension of a crime in progress to the surreal turn of the tables. Morricone's score also supports the film's comic tone the frequent of quirky sounding instuments and humorous melodic lines. One of the most jarring sound effects that reinforces the genre blending theme is when we hear the whinnying of a horse when the radiator hose of Bobby's Mustang explodes.

The outstanding acting performances of *U-Turn* also make it a much underrated film. Sean Penn's talent as an actor is often simply taken for granted, but as the desperate Bobby Cooper, Penn has to draw upon a deep reservoir of emotions to depict his feelings and expressions in an extreme set of circumstances. At different times, Bobby is angry, frustrated, arrogant, or begging for mercy, and Penn's performance in *U-Turn* is on a par with any of his previous starring roles. He, more than any other actor working in films today, gives himself over completely to the role. Penn is on screen in almost every scene and the role demands that he become at times hysterical and livid, a strongly persuading lover, and a man reduced to sheer desperation through his many ups and downs. In the supporting roles, Stone has assembled a host of talented character actors that collectively constitute a Fellini-esque gallery of monsters. As the female lead, Jennifer Lopez gives a playful performance that is both tender in its vulnerability, yet steaming with eroticism. Her character, Grace, despite her exquisite exterior, is a wounded child, who is primarily motivated by the fear of being alone and the desire to be loved. Nick Nolte, outfitted in a grotesque costume, gives a superb voice performance with much more of a rough edge than audiences have grown accustomed to seeing in him, and Powers Boothe, who plays the hard drinking and corrupt Sheriff Virgil Potter, symbolizes the upside-down moral universe and perversity of this town.

Perhaps the finest of the supporting performances is given by Billy Bob Thornton as Darrell. From the second he appears on screen in his absurd make-up, Thornton is an unrelenting object of farce. Covered in filth, and seemingly unaware of his low IQ and cultural backwardness, Darrell's sheer stupidity constantly causes him to be underestimated. In a fit of rage Bobby shouts, "You're just an ignorant, inbred, tumbleweed fuck!" but, ultimately, he gets the best of Bobby. Claire Danes also gives a noteworthy performance as Jenny, the town's attention seeking nymphet, who takes an interest in Bobby and drives her ridiculously jealous lover boy into a tizzy. Witnessing Jenny's relentless pursuit of the stranger in town, Toby N. Tucker (Joaquin Phoenix), Jenny's beau, challenges the uninterested Bobby to a fight to defend her honor by saying in a deadpan twang: "You and I got a little man's business to take care of." Jenny and Toby, like the other supporting roles, are drawn as strongly stereotyped caricatures whose outrageous antics and cartoonish behavior frustrate Bobby's attempt to escape the bizarre world of Superior. These constant trials in extreme circumstances test Bobby's character.

Bobby tries to get gas station owner Darrell (Billy Bob Thornton) to fix his car.

In the final movement of the film, the picture's philosophical theme is revealed. *U-Turn,* a picture that at first appears a typical thriller, is ultimately about Bobby's character and his nihilistic view of spiritual matters. This is most evident in Bobby's encounters with the town derelict, a blind man, played by Jon Voight. Voight's blind man, who sees more than the sighted, gives Bobby cryptic clues about his spiritual hollowness and lack of humility. Grace's husband Jake identifies Bobby as a man without scruples and offers to pay Bobby a substantial portion of the insurance money if he kills Grace. Although Bobby protests that he is not a killer, Jake tells him, "You got a killin' in you." Grace also tries to intuit Bobby's true character and manipulate him sexually into doing away with Jake to set her free. When Bobby shrinks back in horror from her wicked plan and tells her, "I'm not a killer Grace," she replies, "It's in you." Despite the fact that he is a souless rascal and behaves like a scoundrel, Bobby is unwilling to cross a certain moral line. When Grace asks Bobby what he thinks happens to peoples' spirits when they die, he says: "Nothing. They're just dead meat!" The desert peaks, canyons, and valleys are ultimately a metaphor for the desolation and emptiness of Bobby's soul.

The double-crossing, spiritual nihilism, complete lack of trust of the story all come together in the film's suprising climactic sequence. Despite all the turmoil they have been through together, the final confrontation between Bobby and Grace demonstrates the impossibility of happiness between these two notorious characters. As Bobby and Grace fight to the death, he states, "I love you Grace, but I can't trust you." The moment is strikingly captured on celluloid with a comprehensive life-review flashback montage and the brilliant imagery of Native American mysticism.

The fact that *U-Turn* has been overlooked by audiences and critics alike cannot be attributed to stylistic faults, story, or performances. Perhaps the film will be re-evaluated and full consideration will be given to its aesthetic merits when the dark cloud of controversy and visceral reaction that presently accompany the release of any of Stone's pictures recedes from the horizon. *U-Turn* encapsulates all of Stone's stylistic innovations as a filmmaker and works his themes successfully within a fictional narrative. It achieves a much higher level of thematic continuity, dramatic resolution, and fit between subject and scale than his brilliant, but ultimately artistically unsuccessful *Natural Born Killers.*

Eric Bryant Rhodes's review of *Lost Highway* appeared in the Spring 1998 issue of *Film Quarterly.*

Book Reviews

Film Policy

International, National and Regional Perspectives

Edited by Albert Moran. New York: Routledge, 1996. $65.00 cloth; $18.95 paper.

Concerns over the interrelation of national and international cinemas are among the most prominent issues in film studies at the moment, though there have been two largely distinct paradigms for pursuing these subjects. The more prevalent approach has been to concentrate on the ideological effects of (inter)national cinemas, read in terms of the cultural construction of identities. If the analyst wishes, these national (and other) identities can then be read in relation to pressures and policies experienced, or exerted, by states. The more empirically based approach, of which this anthology is the most recent example, begins the study of national and international cinemas from their institutional bases within the state. The strong arguments in favour of this approach are to ground the study of national cinema in a firmly materialist analysis and to view questions of national cinema within a political framework where specific policies can be identified and engaged with, in a small scale, bottom-up fashion. A concentration on policy acknowledges that films exist and circulate under a series of historically determined conditions, and that any ideological role played by films is not simply ideational, but linked to material practices and interests. It also assumes a role for film scholars in policy formulation extending beyond ideological critique.

This does not mean, however, that proponents of this approach can put off theoretical questions. As its subtitle suggests, this book deals with institutional film politics on three levels: the international, the national, and the intranational. This structure is important insomuch as it recognizes that globalization does not simply entail the replacement of one regime by another, but rather involves an adjustment of pressures and emphases within a preexistent set of relations. Movements toward globalization produce national and regional reactions in response, no less in the media than in other spheres of geopolitics. The tripartite structure of the book points to the enduring centrality of the nation as a lynchpin around which these pressures are experienced and responded to. At the same time, no one can write around national cinemas these days without acknowledging the ambivalence with which contemporary identity politics views the idea of the nation. As Albert Moran points out in his introduction, one of the principle frameworks for dealing with international media flows has been to see them in terms of cultural imperialism, though this position is now seen as problematic due to its investment in the cultural autonomy of nations and national production industries.

The writers in this anthology reflect a more complex range of approaches to relations between core and peripheries in international media. The opening section of the anthology, dealing with international flows of screen media, foregrounds a number of key issues. International film flows are, of course, no new phenomenon and if there is a core from which these flows emanate, it still goes by the name of Hollywood. Given that Tino Balio has been one of the chief figures in analyzing the success of the earlier Hollywood studio system, his piece here on the horizontally and vertically integrated companies employing the trademarks of the old Hollywood majors in the 1980s and 1990s provides an interesting basis for the comparison of the new and old Hollywoods. The current success of the U.S. majors can be seen as a reassertion of the strengths of the classical studio system, a system whose success involved a strategy of high-budget production which gave Hollywood a comparative trade advantage to be exploited by international distribution systems. The other support on which Hollywood has typically rested has been the ability to use first release to organize prices for subsequent markets. The strength of vertical integration in the old Hollywood was that first-run domestic release could be controlled and that this provided an exchange value for films in later markets. In the contemporary film industry, theatrical release performs a similar function, with horizontal integration facilitating the ability of the majors to benefit from ancillary release markets.

Clearly, film policy cannot be considered in isolation from other screen media. Although we have no pieces here on the implications of multimedia and the internet, the anthology includes a chapter by Manuel Alvarado on exchange values in international video markets. Alvarado takes up the question of exchange value in video commodities, arguing that "broadcasters are unable to have a precise concept of the value of a television programme," and that prices are therefore generally based on the size of markets measured by television set ownership. This is akin to Stephen Wildman and Steven Siwek's position in their book, *International Trade in Films and Television Programs* (1988), in which they reckon domestic demand advantage in terms of population and Gross Domestic Product. While the financial extent of a consumption market is clearly an important component in comparative advantage in image markets as well as in pricing structures, the emphasis on this as the sole pricing mechanism is somewhat misleading. It ignores the role of first markets in arriving at *relative* values for programming. Therefore the success of "ER" in its domestic market will mean that it will be offered for sale in other markets at a higher cost relative to other programs within a given market. While Jonathan D. Levy also presents a richly detailed statistical analysis in this first section of the changes in U.S. television which have undermined network audience viewership, he similarly underestimates the role of the networks as a first release platform which is central in establishing values for subsequent markets.

Where the opening section of the anthology concentrates on the relations between large production blocs and global trade, particularly the GATT negotiations and European coproduction strategies, the second section deals centrally with national cinemas. One might expect that policy studies would accentuate this emphasis, given the role of the state

in generating legislative and administrative frameworks for national production industries. The chapters here on Asian cinemas—India, Indonesia, and Singapore—are indispensible for anyone interested in the study of censorship and the positioning of this regulatory instrument in the larger context of state policies. Manjanath Pendukar uses censorship in India as an example of the way postcolonialism builds on the models and attitudes of colonial administration. His interest is in the way censorship is exercised against domestic productions to limit artistic and political expression. Krishna Sen sees Indonesian censorship being similarly directed against internal production while allowing local populations relatively unhindered access to international films. She raises the intriguing possibility that media flows across national borders can be seen as agents of a state-dictated status quo and not necessarily as the Western cultural imperialism that we so often assume. These two essays can be very fruitfully juxtaposed with David Birch's analysis centering around censorship in Singapore. In contrast to the situation in India and Indonesia, Birch concentrates on the way Singaporean censorship is directed mainly against Western films. Where Sen and Pendakur focus on the repressive and exclusionary aspects of censorship, Birch is disposed to see it as more of an ideological state apparatus, one whose function is to demonize the West and thereby win consent for a version of regional and national identity which defines itself through a rejection of Western moral decadence.

Birch's piece on Singapore, which attempts to link question of policy to those of identity, provides a neat segue into the final section of the anthology, which deals with regional (or more properly, intranational) issues. This section foregrounds the kind of identity politics and the critical perspectives on the nation with which we are familiar from other recent work in the humanities. From below, from the perspective of intranational groups who feel themselves to be marginalized by virtue of race, ethnicity, or region, discourses of the national become hegemonic constructions whose function is to establish and maintain the dominance of certain interests. While it is all very well to point to the nation as a construction, many theorists also point out that we deconstruct it at our own risk, as nations and national cultures still provide one of the best means of resistance against the hegemony of collective international identities and modes of social organization.

Ron Burnett's chapter on the politics of Quebec cinema provides an extremely useful discussion of many of the issues involved in identity politics and cultural production. Burnett points out the problems at the heart of cultural politics, in that culture (however defined) is fluid enough to defy any attempts to control it through legislative means. Attempts to legislate culture will generally involve an essentializing of selected cultural traits or genres as part of an "authentic" cultural tradition. Hobsbawm and Ranger's work on the invention of traditions is a model for this type of analysis, but even in Moran's anthology we can see this essentializing at work in Carole Sklan's defense of regional film cultures in Australia. Burnett's conclusion, in the case of Canada, is a resolutely pragmatic one. One can play national cultural politics as long as one is ready to recognize the provisional nature of the enterprise and the way that the national and regional cultures are relationally constructed and maintained, so that the identification of the nationally and regionally specific may thus well come through external groups.

If this collection takes up a range of issues that will be familiar to many in film and media studies, it does so to invest them with a fresh relevance due to their links to specific political debates and policy decisions. One criticism levelled at some of the more abstractly theoretical models of cinema and other media is that they posit forces such as symbolic orders of patriarchy or capitalism which are defined in such vast terms as to verge on the ahistorical. Policy studies suffer from the opposite problem—of coming to show their age very quickly. This anthology grew out of a conference held in 1991, and although most of the contributions now deal with the state of financial and policy developments up to about 1994, one is left wanting a new edition which updates pressing issues such as satellite broadcasting, the role of digitization in television and its consequences for the convergence of film, television, and the internet, and the role of the World Trade Organization in international audiovisual products. The editors of Routledge's *Culture: Policies and Politics* series begin by referring to media politics as mundane—perhaps, but we certainly need to move quickly to stay abreast of them.

Mike Walsh teaches at Flinders University of South Australia, in Adelaide.

High Contrast

Race and Gender in Contemporary Hollywood Film

By Sharon Willis. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1997.

The book *High Contrast: Race and Gender in Contemporary Hollywood Film* is one of the most informed critical examinations published to date of the intersection of gender and race (reversal of words intended, as explained below) with respect to contemporary cinema. Willis forces the reader to appreciate the utility of theoretical concepts in their applicability to the readings and interpretations she imposes on contemporary films. She utilizes such tools with eloquence and brilliance in deconstructing motivating factors that might induce gender and race to assume a performative function in controlling the gaze of spectators.

Race and Gender in Contemporary Hollywood Film is divided into two sections. As noted above, Willis's material suggests the need for reversing the words in her title; her first section examines films that allow her to provide a specifically feminist (and also racial) reading (e.g., *Die Hard, Lethal Weapon, Fatal Attraction, Someone to Watch Over Me, Sea of Love, The Hand That Rocks the Cradle, Basic Instinct, Thelma & Louise, Terminator 2*). Willis contends that this section was designed to examine "big-budget treatments

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of the 'battle of the sexes' in an effort to show how collective fantasies and anxieties about other forms of social difference—race, sexuality, ethnicity, and class—may be mapped onto, and embedded within, an arena that understands itself to be primarily organized by heterosexual negotiations and conflicts" (19–20).

For the purpose of Willis's work, race is reduced to the African-American experience as rendered in these films, to the exclusion of other ethnicities that might similarly be categorized under the rubric of race. However, because some of the films present (a) only one or two African-American characters, and (b) characters who are confined to marginal roles, these films provide a primarily feminist reading of the text rather than a racial reading, as they intersect.

For example, Willis prefaces her examination of *Die Hard* and *Lethal Weapon* with the assertion that she intends to explore "the ways in which black-and-white bonding takes place across and through the spectacle of the battered white male body, displacing any aggressive component into vicious combat between white men" (32). Willis demonstrates skill and insight in her reading of how race is utilized to foreground white masculinity. Critiquing *Fatal Attraction* and *Basic Instinct,* Willis takes the position that these films suggest that "feminine force seems to arise at the direct expense of masculine power and bodily integrity" (61), and that femininity becomes inextricably linked to masculinity, a position widely shared by feminist film critics. Willis claims that these films, and *Fatal Attraction* in particular, focus "on an urgent effort to reinscribe the border of sexual difference at exactly the divide between domestic interior and public space" (67). Willis prefaces her examination of *Thelma & Louise* with the questions, "Whose fantasies are these? What does it mean to use a possessive term here in relation to fantasy structures? How does the uneasy possessive relate to the troubling effects of linking women to violence?" (99). She provides an intriguing, compelling, and forceful response, adding to the plethora of literature that examines the intersection of race and gender in contemporary cinema.

The second section of Willis's work examines the films produced by auteur filmmakers David Lynch, Spike Lee, and Quentin Tarantino. Without examining the entire body of these filmmakers' works, Willis focuses her investigation by invoking a single argument; her central thesis examines how each work is metaphorically transfigured into the filmmaker's own persona as it represents auteur filmmakers. For example, Willis suggests that Lynch's name becomes a metaphor for the "Lynch-effect," which she characterizes as "the site traversed by conscious and unconscious discourse that gives a name and historical location to the film" (132). She applies this by subtly weaving into her critique of *Wild at Heart* her surmise that in the lynching, "the brutal murder of a black man by a white man is surreptitiously charged to the white woman's account" (138).

Critiquing Spike Lee's *Jungle Fever,* Willis contends that "Lee always emerges in his films as both a slippery, ambivalent, and slightly shady character, who is often the object of implicit critique, and who functions as an extradiegetic resistance interrupting the narrative texture. As a textual figure, then, Lee circulates his own body and image through his films as he does those of many of his regular actors" (165). Willis further argues that while the dominant media read the film as a failed ethnography of interracial relationships, "it overlooked the possibility that the film might perform another ethnography, an ethnography of the dominant white gaze" (178–79).

As for Quentin Tarantino, Willis opens her discussion by asserting that it is no accident that he confines his films to the bathroom, which "anchors a dense nexus that connects blood and violence to anal eroticism and smearing" (189). Willis continues: "It thus permits delicate intersections of aggressive soiling impulses with tense efforts to consolidate, to clean, and to retain at the literal level and with social hygienic dreams of sanitizing a word like 'nigger' at the figurative level" (189). Willis then reduces Tarantino's auteur status to being "closely coincident with his cult status" which can be attributed to the fact that "the filmmaker's persona and his film embody a nostalgia for a 1970s that is continually circulating in television, videocassettes, and radio" (197).

Willis's study is limited by the small body of contemporary films she critiques. There is also a question about her title vis-à-vis material: the title foregrounds race, when in reality the book is much more about gender. Also, she specifically addresses African Americans. As for gender, although Willis makes a strong case for advancing the struggle of feminists to liberate themselves from continued male domination as transformed in cinema, her critique of exclusively male auteur filmmakers might undermine the struggle she so forcefully advances.

One of Willis's most compelling revelations is her assertion that the truth of whiteness might emerge in another's gaze. But the dominant culture posits this gaze only in order to represent it consistently as internalized and ventriloquized, as a marker of difference in a scene where subjects do not engage in reciprocal exchange, but, rather, in mutual surveillance. So while such figures mark allusions to the social field, they simultaneously operate as indexes of paranoid fantasies that situate African Americans as the ones who know the truth about race, while avoiding any occasion for a reciprocated gaze that would cause the dominant culture to look at itself through another's eyes (5–6).

In the final analysis, for those working in cinema—whether contemporary or historical—Willis's work is a must read.

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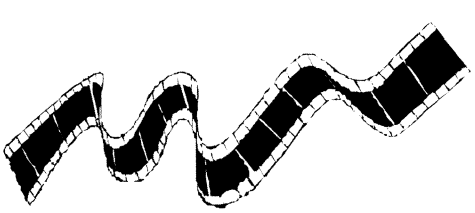

Hong Kong

Culture and the Politics of Disappearance

By Ackbar Abbas. University of Minnesota Press, 1997.

Hong Kong Babylon

An Insider's Guide to the Hollywood of the East

By Fredric Dannen and Barry Long. Boston: Faber and Faber, 1997. $12.99.

It is a sad irony of history that just as the Hong Kong cinema is finding a popular audience in the West and there are the beginnings of serious scholarship, the industry itself is in decline. The fact that many of Hong Kong's leading artists have found a sanctuary in Hollywood has, of course, stimulated Western interest, but at the same time it has added to the draining of energy from this once vibrant cinema. Formerly the third largest film industry in the world after the United States and India, local production in 1997 dropped by 22 percent and has halved since 1994. And for the first time since industry figures have been collected, overseas productions have outgrossed local productions at the box office.

In the United States prior to the 1990s, Hong Kong cinema was known only to a cult audience, with the exception of the Bruce Lee films. Likewise, the books that existed in English were either fan publications or photo displays. Happily both situations are changing.

Hong Kong, by Ackbar Abbas, a cultural critic who teaches at the University of Hong Kong, is the first book to address Hong Kong cinema in a scholarly manner. Despite its recent appearance, the essays have already been widely cited by other scholars. The chapters cover a broad range of subjects, including architecture, photography, narrative fiction, and poetry, as well as cinema. In fact, cinema is contextualized within the broader area of Hong Kong culture and analyzed from a very particular perspective, i.e., the ability of certain Hong Kong filmmakers to respond to the cultural space of the city, to critique questions of visibility, and to rethink the issues of film genre, the basis of so much of Hong Kong cinema. Likewise, given that Abbas was writing in the period just before the handover, which returned the colony to Mainland China, much of the material addresses questions of colonialism and post-colonialism and the complex ways in which Hong Kong culture, including film, has negotiated these transitions and traumas.

Hong Kong makes no attempt to provide a history of the industry (for that, see Steven Teo's *Hong Kong Cinema,* to be reviewed by Tony Williams in an upcoming issue of *FQ*). Nor is Abbas addressing the popular cinema of filmmakers such as John Woo and Ringo Lam. However, there is no bias against the commercial cinema; in fact, Abbas clearly states the slippery issues related to commercialism in discussing Hong Kong films and strongly states his belief in the ability of popular film to register both the social and political Zeitgeist in a more complex and innovative manner than the often well-intentioned art film, which he feels frequently misfires, becoming merely simplistic and tendentious.

The major thesis of *Hong Kong* is what Abbas calls *déjà disparu.* By this Abbas means an uncanny feeling "that what is new and unique about the situation is always already gone, and we are left holding a handful of clichés, or a cluster of memories of what has never been." This has come about as a result of Hong Kong's rapid change and modernization, fueled by a recent desire to locate and fix a sense of Hong Kong identity. Abbas finds that it is this philosophic and melancholy sensation of *déjà disparu* which best typifies contemporary Hong Kong, Hong Kong culture, and a particular group of filmmakers who have responded to this sense of the city. He approaches their work through an exploration of five intersecting themes: 1) the ambiguous question of commercialism; 2) the problematics of affectivity in the dislocated spaces represented in their works; 3) the use of genres as structuring (and sometimes subversive) devices; 4) the importance of the Cantonese language; and 5) the appearance of an idiosyncratic form of post-colonial subjectivity.

In the context of *déjà disparu,* Abbas focuses on four filmmakers: Stanley Kwan (*Rouge* and *Actress*), Ann Hui *(The Song of the Exile),* Tsui Hark *(Once Upon a Time in China),* and Wong Kar-wai, to whom Abbas devotes an entire chapter. It is to be noted that Wong Kar-wai, long respected by Hong Kong cognoscenti, won the 1997 Best Director's award at the Cannes International Film Festival for his film *Happy Together.*

In addition to providing a framework for discussing Hong Kong cinema that goes beyond the usual comments on kinesthetic violence, razor-blade editing, acrobatic performances, breathtaking stunts (often done by the performers themselves), and narratives which move at the speed of a bullet train (all produced on low budgets and short shooting schedules), *Hong Kong* forces the reader to come to terms with the real complexities of this modern international city, where culture is always in the process of changing and disappearing, where the clichéd descriptions of East vs. West, traditional vs. modern, commercial vs. spiritual no longer hold, if they ever did. The book also should serve as a warning that despite the appeal of Hong Kong films, viewers need to be cautious about the tendency toward easy interpretation. Although the films initially seem universal and easily accessible, unlike the exoticism of the works of Chen Kaige and Zhang Yimou, Abbas subtly pushes home the message that like the city which is continually disappearing before our eyes, Hong Kong cinema is often a question of seeing what is not there, as well as not seeing what is there.

At the other end of the spectrum is Fredric Dannen and Barry Long's *Hong Kong Babylon*—the right book at the right time. Written from the perspectives of a journalist and a film collector, it provides an introduction to Hong Kong film written in a lively and entertaining fashion, and a compendium of information, most of which is very useful, as these facts are hard to find in English in any one place.

The book begins with a chapter that briefly covers the history of Hong Kong cinema, information about production, and stories about the major players and stars. Dannon is big on the human interest factor and includes

details on The Triad influence, which he has written about elsewhere (*The New Republic,* July 1997). Despite its brevity, the chapter does capture the flavor of the liveliness that existed in the heyday of the Hong Kong cinema.

The second part of the book consists of interviews with leading film stars, directors, and others. These are interesting, but could have been so much more useful had they been conducted in depth. Although most of the big names are there, some of the most important people are missing, such as Maggie Cheung and Brigitte Lin, to name two. The major corpus of the book are the plot summaries written by Barry Long, which provide a one-paragraph summary and basic credits. The 300-plus titles are drawn from the beginnings of the Hong Kong New Wave (1970s) to the present. Although viewers can easily differ on plot outlines, most are serviceable. And for a cinema in which it is not unusual to have Parts I, II, III, IV and V of a film title, it is helpful to have these summaries just to keep the films straight.

The biggest miscalculation is the final section, entitled "Recommended Viewing." Here the authors asked twelve film critics, programmers, and film buffs to rate and defend their favorite Hong Kong films. This information was then collated and a list of the voting supplied. This might have been fine, but to allot almost 100 pages for this exercise is a waste of pulp. Much of what is said is redundant. More serious is the fact that the candidates are primarily non-Chinese, non-Hong Kongers; although they may be informed afficionados, the imbalance diminishes the value of the overall evaluation. Or perhaps put another way, it provides a skewed view of the Hong Kong cinema.

Photographs scattered throughout the text add to the reader's pleasure, but the lack of an index is sure to produce frustration. But, in the main, I am happy to have *Hong Kong Babylon* until something more definitive comes along. And as for *Hong Kong,* it is unlikely that any serious scholar attempting to write on Hong Kong film will be able to do so without consideration of Abbas's work.

Patricia Brett Erens teaches at Rosary College.

Pretty Pictures

Production Design and the History Film.

By Charles S. Tashiro. Austin, TX: University of Texas Press, 1998.

Academic film criticism has engaged with narrative, ideology, and authors, but rarely with such vital components of the production process as cinematography, editing, or production design. To an extent, this lacuna serves a protective function, insulating critical assertions about cinematic design from the pragmatic issues that are faced by filmmakers, and that ground and shape those designs. An unfortunate rift has existed between theory and practice in academic criticism, and the field as a whole would benefit from closer attention to what film design owes the exigencies of the production process.

Charles S. Tashiro's *Pretty Pictures* is among a select few books to examine the contributions of production design in shaping the overall look and feel of a film. But Tashiro construes production design rather differently than other authors who have explored this topic. As traditionally understood, production design designates the creation of the physical environments seen on screen, achieved through the use of location work, sets, and miniature models. The design of these environments necessarily overlaps with the work of cinematography since issues of light and color are relevant in both domains. Nevertheless, as a job designation, production design has clear parameters.

Tashiro, by contrast, greatly expands these parameters. He uses the term more broadly to designate all those processes relevant to creating the overall *visual* look of a film, and these go well beyond the boundaries of production design as traditionally defined. Tashiro is interested in visual design rather than production design per se. "I view 'design' in the sense of the *total* cinematic image. My discussion therefore encompasses not just the contributions of production designers, but also of cinematographers, directors, other visual technicians, and ultimately, the viewer."

As a result of this shift of emphasis, readers interested in a more conventional account of production design and who were drawn to the book by its subtitle may find that its concerns only occasionally tally with their interests. But readers interested in the aesthetic and social attributes of film design, broadly construed, will find Tashiro's presentation to be provocative, rich, and well informed. His enlarged concept of design, for example, permits discussion of factors not normally considered in relation to the creation of visual environments. These include the design functions of widescreen frame ratios, camera movement, and closed versus open framing.

The book is divided into three very different sections. The first section is in many ways the most exciting, because it lays out the conceptual premises of the study. Examining general issues of visual design in the cinema, Tashiro recasts some conventional critical axioms about how meaning functions in cinema. Differing with the premises of much contemporary film theory, he suggests that meaning is not constrained or recuperated by narrative or ideology, though these latter remain relevant considerations. Rather, he argues that by referencing objects, design imports a rich realm of meaning to the viewer. Visual design contains a plenitude of associative and implicit meanings bound to objects and their display, and viewers bring these associations to the design or extract them from it. Filmmakers cannot control these associations. "As a result, we are able to respond as the filmmakers intend, or not, depending on mood or circumstance. One person's metaphor is another's boredom; one person's passionate identification becomes another's reason for ridicule."

This phenomenon, in turn, points toward Tashiro's most fascinating claim: that design is an arrangement of surface and that "films' surfaces endure better than their 'depths.'" The physical surfaces organized through design hold an inherent fascination for viewers and compel a level of interest

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In contradistinction to the claims of academic theory regarding the ways that images can function as visual metaphors for some larger pyschological, social, or political condition, Tashiro argues that this presupposes viewers who are willing to fill in the metaphor's blanks. "Without such willingness, the physical fact of the Realistic image remains its first meaning." Surface again takes precedence over depth. By arguing thusly in the first section, Tashiro prepares the ground for the defense of pleasure against the arrows of post-structuralism which he offers later in the book.

In the book's second section, Tashiro examines design principles in three categories of historical film. These are (a) pictures that aim for a realistic recreation of history through an exhaustive accumulation of period detail, (b) pictures that subordinate history to the formalism of design for its own sake, and (c) pictures that aim to make their designs serve didactic purposes. Close analysis of two films in each category clarifies the design strategies at work in each. The discussions of design strategies in Alain Resnais' *Stavisky* and Peter Watkins' *Edvard Munch* are especially insightful and revealing.

The analyses are very perceptive but they remain confined to a single genre. Design is of critical importance in period films, but these films represent a narrow slice of design territory in cinema. Even so, Tashiro further reduces the range of his materials. He narrowly defines the history film in terms that exclude as much as they include. As he writes, "Thus, *The Birth of a Nation,* not *Gone With the Wind; Ludwig: the Mad King of Bavaria,* not *Lola Montes; The Last Emperor,* not *The Sand Pebbles; Juarez,* not *Vera Cruz; Edvard Munch,* not *Lust for Life,*" etc. Furthermore, he maintains that, outside the history film, even highly stylized and artificial environments are grounded in norms of realism (which serve to heighten the artifice). While this is not a problematic assertion, it would be interesting for Tashiro to justify it by explicating the design principles of *fantasy* worlds as depicted in films like *Batman* or *Blade Runner.* (He briefly alludes in the text to these films.) The reader is struck by the disparity between the conceptual richness of Tashiro's approach to design and the rather narrow range of material to which it is applied.

The book's third section digresses from issues of design per se, as Tashiro explores the social networks of consumption in which popular designs may become embedded as product spin-offs from popular movies. The fashion craze for fur hats that *Doctor Zhivago* apparently stimulated in the mid-60s provides the basis for a philosophical discussion of movie-inspired product marketing and consumption. This material is tenuously related to the design issues explored in previous sections, but it enables Tashiro to negotiate his way toward the book's conclusion, wherein he criticizes the suspicion of pleasure embedded in much post-structural criticism and argues instead for its necessity and acceptance. "Pleasure can be understood only by being accepted."

Pretty Pictures makes a persuasive case that the physical surfaces of film carry a range of meaning that has been underestimated in film criticism; they are responsible for a large quotient of the pleasure movies provide and are among the medium's most enduring features. The application of Tashiro's analytic model to period films yields a series of exemplary explications of the design strategy in specific historical realist films. But the book leaves the reader wanting more, in particular that Tashiro turn his considerable talents to a broader range of films beyond period pieces and the design strategies they exhibit. The pleasures that design provides is Tashiro's real topic. Just as design transcends the history film, one hopes that he will pursue this issue across a variety of film genres and that this excellent book is the start of an extended inquiry.

Stephen Prince teaches in the Communication Studies Department at Virginia Tech in Blacksburg; he is the book review editor of *FQ*.

Reel Patriotism

The Movies and Wold War I

By Leslie Midkiff DeBauche. Madison, WI: University of Wisconsin Press, 1997. $50.00 cloth; $15.95 paper.

Reel Patriotism, a well-written study of film production, distribution, and exhibition during World War I, is a model of meticulous research about an important but neglected subject, but it also raises issues regarding the interpretation of data. Citing sources such as correspondence, government records, scripts, newspaper articles, and trade journals, Leslie Midkiff DeBauche summarizes the film industry's response to war and provides an example of historical writing underrated by film scholars who do not travel to archives. Yet she is reluctant to develop a larger conceptual framework for the empirical data that she has so laboriously accumulated. DeBauche claims that her book represents a "melding" of film history with social and cultural history, but does not discuss her work in relation to others in film studies. As for social and cultural history, she does not define either in terms of subject matter or methodology, and relies instead on conventional political history in her brief descriptions of the era. Actually, some cultural historians like T.J. Jackson Lears and Richard Wightman Fox disagree with the premises of social historians positing the documentary model. And some social historians like Mary P. Ryan have combined statistical analysis of demographic data with readings of texts.

DeBauche's more specific claims about the film industry are clearly stated in the introduction: wartime cooperation with government agencies produced benefits such as continued film production and distribution, goodwill that later spurred investment in industry stocks and deflected censorship, and provided material to exploit for narrative films. Unmentioned in the introduction but sprinkled through the chapters is the assertion that increased vertical integration and film as a mass-produced product played a role in the formation of a national consciousness. DeBauche refers to the

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cultural divide between rural and urban America, but scarcely mentions more seismic demographic shifts, namely, unprecedented immigration resulting in racial, ethnic, and class divisions that would erupt in the Red Scare and labor strife. There is also a brief assertion that film became acceptable to the middle class as a result of the industry's cooperation with the government during the war. Such arguments are compelling and should have been explored in the introduction, with reference to works by Charles Musser, Tom Gunning, Miriam Hansen, Janet Staiger, Roberta Pearson and William Uricchio, Ben Singer, Roy Rosenzweig, Kathy Peiss, Lizabeth Cohen, and Steven Ross, among others, to build an interpretive framework. Instead, DeBauche writes chapters fragmented into numerous short sections that do not cumulatively develop a complex argument, but represent separate case studies about the industry's response to war.

The first case study concerns Cecil B. DeMille's *Joan the Woman* (1916), a historical epic about Joan of Arc starring famed Metropolitan soprano Geraldine Farrar. DeBauche persuasively asserts that the exploitation of this epic provides an example of "practical patriotism" because its promotion shifted in response to "events on the national and international diplomatic fronts" (18). But insofar as the epic was "primarily promoted as a costume drama and a star vehicle," her failure to mention exploitation of the film's Handschiegl two-color process seems an oversight (23). As for reception, DeBauche argues that the industry promoted national unity but does not fully explore the significance of the response of the Catholic Church. Indeed, urban centers with large Catholic ethnic populations represented a marketing problem, especially since the epic was constructed as public history for the genteel middle class. As the director's correspondence attests, he suggested that exhibitors make cuts depending on whether the audience was Catholic or Protestant.

Chapter 2, "The Films of World War I," has very useful data: only 23 percent of films and 50 percent of specials and roadshows produced in 1917–1918 were war-related. Despite the title, this informative chapter is mostly about the career of Mary Pickford. During the war she made topical films such as DeMille's *The Little American,* based in part on the sinking of the *Lusitania,* as well as films that continued to appeal to children. All the star's films were marketed in relation to several high-profile campaigns to sell Liberty bonds. As DeBauche convincingly demonstrates, the wartime activities of "America's Sweetheart" or "Our Mary," as she was labeled during these years, molded the persona of the star.

A chapter on exhibitors, still battling vertical intergration and engaged in a struggle with producers, is very illuminating in that it shows how theater managers capitalized on the war effort to attract filmgoers. Analysis of Milwaukee as a case study asserts that standardization of film exhibition instilled patriotism in the city's large German population. Absent, however, is any attempt to contextualize the case of Milwaukee's Germans with respect to the larger issue of the role of the leisure industry in Americanizing less assimilable "new" immigrants. Next is a superbly documented study of the cooperation between the film industry, represented by the National Association of the Motion Picture Industry, and government agencies such as the Committee on Public Information, the Food Administration, and the Treasury Department. Cooperation between George Kleine and the U.S. Marines in the production and distribution of *The Unbeliever* (1918), the Edison Company's last feature, is explored as a relevant case study.

A very useful chapter on the film industry at war's end focuses on the production of "fewer and better pictures," a trend antedating the war and resulting in higher rental costs and longer runs at increased ticket prices. Conditions did favor the growth of independent productions, but these films were often distributed by the major studios and did not pose a threat to increasing vertical integration. Citing *Motion Picture News* on the decline of the neighborhood theater in Chicago, DeBauche argues that wartime production of fewer pictures shown in bigger theaters represents a "general industry-wide tendency toward concentration" (143). Yet Lizabeth Cohen shows in her study of the Chicago working class that neighborhood venues remained an important site validating localized culture in the immediate postwar period. A final section in this chapter focuses on Charlie Chaplin's *Shoulder Arms* (1918), a film that was marketed in response to events such as the Spanish influenza epidemic and the signing of the armistice.

A thoughtful last chapter discusses the representation of war in films such as *The Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse* (1921) and *Wings* (1927) which were produced during the 1920s. According to DeBauche, films receiving the most critical attention and reworked in later decades focused on combat and minimized the role of women. Although she begins her study with a discussion of DeMille's epic about Joan of Arc, she does not pursue the subject of the renegotiation of gender roles in postwar films and what it might signify. She notes that attitudes about the war became more ambiguous and, in the book's conclusion, argues that the construction of the fallen soldier as a martyr enhanced the power of the state.

To sum up, DeBauche's study rewards the reader with many fascinating details that are the result of painstaking research, but raises issues about how film history should be written as an interdisciplinary work. Constructing case studies about wartime production, distribution, and exhibition, DeBauche insulates rather than situates her work in relation to other works in film studies, cultural studies, and social and cultural history. Put another way, she raises, but then skirts, issues of ethnicity, class, and gender as these relate to developments in the motion picture industry in the 1910s and 1920s. Had she grappled with the complex social and cultural issues of the "real" world, *Reel Patriotism* would have been a bracing book. Nevertheless, DeBauche's careful research is so impressive that it represents an important contribution to film history and will serve as the basis of future endeavors.

Sumiko Higashi is the author of *Cecil B. DeMille and American Culture: The Silent Era.*

Representing the Woman

Cinema and Psychoanalysis

By Elizabeth Cowie. Minneapolis, MN: University of Minnesota Press. 1997. $47.95 cloth; $18.95 paper.

Despite cinema studies' "been there, done that" attitude toward psychoanalysis, Freud's theory refuses to go quietly into that good night. For the most part, it takes on the role of the repressed, undergirding the foundations of such areas as race, gender, and sexuality, not to mention problematizing other areas such as reception studies and ideological analysis. Enter Elizabeth Cowie, with a behemoth of a project that reexamines essential components of both traditional psychoanalytic film theory and feminism. Cowie has made an important contribution for a number of reasons, not the least of which is her countering the disincentive for this kind of necessary reinvestigation that the bypassing of psychoanalytic film theory has created. Several scholars have complained that psychoanalytic film theory did not stop with Metz and Mulvey, yet with barely an exception (like Zizek), little has invigorated the paradigm after these major works, as either revision, reinterpretation, or (as in the case of Studlar) original appropriation. Further, despite the translation of four volumes of Lacan's seminars into English, work on Lacanian psychoanalysis and cinema rarely covers any new ground in the paradigm, recycling much of the same material and quotations. Cowie is a new exception to that trend. Lastly, with respect to psychoanalysis, Cowie's work will be of significance for its return to Freud. With the advent of Lacan in cinema studies, Freud has been made an adjunct to his own work—bypassed in favor of his sometimes less problematic French interpreter. Cowie boldly takes up the work of Freud, discussing his theories at length for what they can offer cinema studies. Laplanche and Pontalis as well as Lacan are then employed to clarify and reinterpret when necessary. Not surprisingly, Cowie demonstrates that Herr Doktor still has some things to say.

In terms of feminist film theory, *Representing the Woman* is a significant reexamination of some of the fundamental issues, if not paradigms, that define the shape and trajectory of study in this area. Indeed, Cowie lays the groundwork here early, establishing her book as a deconstruction of both psychoanalytic film theory and feminism, challenging "the assumption that the construction of woman, of her image, of her desire, is always for the masculine spectator" (11). She then goes on, in chapter 2, to reexamine the thorny issue of the "independent women" films of the 70s (are they progressive or reactionary through a process of recuperation?), and later (chapter 4), the "women's films" of the 30s and 40s. This deconstruction project leads to detailed examinations of both the feminist issues at stake and the critical theoretical concepts of psychoanalysis that relate to them, including identification, the ideal-ego/ego-ideal formations, fantasy, fetish, perversion, the *objet petite a,* the drive, and masquerade (to name a few).

The scope of Cowie's (re)examinations is daunting, and to her credit does not impact the level of discussion or its breadth. Overall, the reader will be impressed with Cowie's consistent patience in fully unpacking the theories and concepts she is dealing with. That combination of scope and detail fairly validate the jacket's claim that the book will be an essential component of every cinema studies and women's studies bookshelf. Indeed, the latter claim will be fulfilled by the manner in which Cowie's reexaminations provide lucid and concise reviews of previous theory before offering insightful correctives, each in a manner that does not assume familiarity on the reader's part. Women's studies courses that want to venture into film and issues of representation will find sections of *Representing the Woman* to be a most valuable introduction.

Furthermore, the precision with which Cowie discusses psychoanalytic theory and critiques traditional psychoanalytic film theory will doubtless create further (and fresher) debate, and lend new models for appropriation in film analysis. At least some of the debate, however, will center on the degree to which Cowie actually advances the psychoanalytic paradigm. Here the enigmatic quality of the work surfaces. For all its clarity in reviewing previous theory, *Representing the Woman* is not quite as lucid in articulating its own models or claims and relating them to specific films, both in terms of feminism and psychoanalytic concepts. There is an almost deconstructionist refusal to erect master narratives or paradigms and see them through, much at the expense of clarity—a surprising disparity for such solid work.

Chapter 2 evidences this inconsistency. After setting up the theoretical conflict—are independent women's films like *Coma* progressive or reactionary?—Cowie resists championing either side, yet does not articulate a clear position for transcending this binary opposition when discussing the film. Cowie argues convincingly that the issue of "recuperating" progressive images is a red herring, and thus clearly shows the theoretical limitations of the earlier debate. Her own foray into Russian formalism in the section "The Story and its Narration," however, is nowhere near as efficient, and seems ill-suited for the claim that reading or viewing is "also a relation of desire" (45). Further, this section of the chapter concludes by making a claim that seems to correspond with the earlier problematized recuperation theme. Cowie's main investigation then goes forward to read the film in terms of "the relations of knowledge it sets out" (46), but here too, the ensuing discussion fails to transcend the conceptual boundaries of the traditional debate. After reading the film through these relations of knowledge, Cowie essentially concludes that the film "narrates how sexist it is" (68), a resolution that is reminiscent of Comolli & Narboni's category "E" films—a disappointing and tenuous conclusion to a detailed analysis.

The discussion of *Coma* is unfortunately symptomatic of a recurring inconsistency: despite its well-founded critique or review of traditional psychoanalytic film theory and thorough exploration of Freudian theory, it does not deliver an equally vivid sense of having mapped out new terrain. The crucial chapter on identification (chapter 3) epitomizes this tendency. Cowie does an impressive job of reexamining the Metz and Baudry constructions, and points

out neglected or overlooked issues (like the fact that Metz's primary and secondary identification does not correspond to the very Lacanian framework he is appropriating). After a thorough review of Freud's work on identification she concludes that "it is impossible to simply map these identifications, or structures, on to the processes of cinematic identification, categorizing some as imaginary, others symbolic"(87). Cowie argues instead for a more "dynamic concept," where cinema, "as representation, is not a reproduction or representation of identities and identifications, but a production and presentation" (87).

Cowie thus establishes the beginnings of a new paradigmatic construct, yet the ensuing discussion seems to revert back to the very kind of trope she has just dispensed with: mapping and categorizing this kind of identification as ego-ideal, that one as ideal-ego. This is further problematized by the way in which certain structures of identification—transitivism and ideal-ego—are independent of the meaning assigned or produced, and instead, are engendered through the structure of representation. The agency of the spectator seems once again to be passive and uniform to what the film promotes. Instead of covering new territory, the argument seems to allow the specter of the positioning of the spectator to enter through the back door. Cowie confirms this when she argues that "narrative is about positionings in relation to another" (117), yet, remarkably, the crucial distinction that needs to be made between being positioned by the text (the "old" psychoanalysis) and taking up a position within the dialectic of desire and recognition (the "new" psychoanalysis), is not the focus of the discussion but its conclusion. The sense that we have not arrived is thus due to the fact that what should be a point of departure is an ending.

Further, Cowie's discussion replicates the limitations of traditional psychoanalytic film theory with respect to identification: the overvaluation of the Imaginary and its correlative, the mirror stage. Cowie's discussion, especially in the critique of Metz (where it is most appropriate), fails to discuss the pre-mirror stage and its subsequent mode of identification (which forms more of a foundation with Metz's identification with the act of "pure perception" than the mirror stage he ascribed it to). This distinctive stage (which gives rise to the more celebrated mirror stage) is once again kept out of the equation of cinematic identification. Moreover, Cowie references Symbolic identification, but more as an adjunct than an active player in a dialectical process. As a result, when she argues in her conclusion for recognition as the support for identification, not its cause, she does not identify the Symbolic mode of identification which regulates the dialectic of recognition and desire. Cowie thus successfully persuades readers that identification in cinema is not a hierarchy (as Metz proposed), but fails to put the dynamic (or dialectical) relationship she alludes to in its place.

This has important ramifications for chapter 4, which investigates the concept of fantasy. Here, Cowie argues that fantasy is "not the achievement of desired objects, but the arranging of, a setting out of, desire " (133), an important reconceptualization which allows the study of film to reintegrate an important psychological operation into its investigation (film as dream and film as fantasy having long been dispensed with). Cowie's examination could well turn out to be one of the field's most significant discussions of fantasy with respect to cinema and spectatorship. At least part of the foundation of this discussion rests on the problematic terrain of identification, but identification will long be debated in the field, while a workable concept of fantasy is well overdue.

It is doubtful that *Representing the Woman* will make any new converts to psychoanalytic film theory or feminism but, in our polemical "information age," few works could achieve such an accomplishment. Cowie's work, however, is a solid contribution that could be the first movement toward a "new" psychoanalysis.

Vincent F. Rocchio teaches at Bradford College.

The Road Movie Book

Edited by Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark. New York: Routledge. 1997. $19.95.

Steven Cohan and Ina Rae Hark have done it again—that is, put together a timely anthology on a compelling film studies topic: the road movie. Whereas their previous excellent collection, *Screening the Male,* had been riding the wave of film scholarship on masculinity during the early 1990s (books on the topic by Kaja Silverman, Peter Lehman, and Susan Jeffords all came out around that time), their new *The Road Movie Book* seems rather to be blazing a trail. The book's attractively hip cover contributes to this sensation: a nighttime, high-speed color photograph triptych of an underpass interior, a rainy windshield, and a white line divider on blacktop. Yet the book's trailblazing significance derives more from the fact that, previously, very little had been written on the road movie (most notably a chapter in Timothy Corrigan's *A Cinema Without Walls* [1991] and Michael Atkinson's "Crossing the Frontiers" essay in the January 1994 *Sight and Sound*). The only book on road movies prior to this anthology is an obscure title by Mark Williams, *Road Movies,* from 1982; long out of print, it's never mentioned in *The Road Movie Book.*

With so little written on a film genre of such popularity—not only with mainstream audiences, but also with independent narrative and experimental filmmakers—*The Road Movie Book* is long overdue and enthusiastically welcomed. As the editors explain in their introduction, the road "has always been a persistent theme of American culture" (1), and has enjoyed a long-standing relationship with film. Like the Western or musical, the road movie "catches peculiarly American dreams, tensions, and anxieties" (2). After suggesting that times of crisis provoke accelerated road movie production (the Depression, the postwar film noir period, the late 1960s, and the early 1990s), Cohan and Hark's introduction proceeds to sketch the significant stages of the genre's development, first singling out *Easy Rider* as a watershed. But this film's status as road movie origin, they claim, has

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"obscured the road movie's own history" (4), which goes back to Hollywood classics like *It Happened One Night.* The transition from Hollywood's road of consensus to the counterculture's rebellious highway was mediated by Jack Kerouac's novel *On The Road* (1955), which mythologized the buddy road trip as Beat wanderlust. Other aspects of the genre's development noted by the editors are the dominance of the outlaw couple *(Gun Crazy, Bonnie and Clyde, Natural Born Killers);* the "turn of road movies in the 1980s from existential narratives of rebellion to comedy and farce" (10); and the 1990s version, spearheaded by *Thelma & Louise,* which features previously marginalized women, gays, and people of color in the driver's seat.

The introduction concludes by outlining the book's three sections: "Mapping Boundaries," which "sketches certain broad thematic and ideological tropes of the genre" (12); "American Roads," which traces "the continual reinvention of the genre in Hollywood cinema from the early 1940s to the end of the 1980s," and finally "Alternative Routes," which "concentrates on road films that depart from the American landscape or that travel on its cultural margins" (13). Most of the essays are remarkably readable without sacrificing intellectual rigor. Taken together, their overall strength resides in how they treat the road movie as reflecting dominant cultural trends, and as inflected more recently by self-conscious political purpose, especially regarding race and gender. Many writers touch upon the contradiction, apparently intrinsic to the genre, between its challenge to social conformity and how the latter stubbornly and insidiously comes along for the ride.

Three of the essays in Part I discuss the road movie in broad strokes, theorizing its pre- and postwar articulation of "the people"; its critique of the contradictions of capitalism through the outlaw couple structure; and the somewhat surprising kinship between this outlaw couple and the backstage Hollywood musical, conceived through the self-reflexive trope of fame. Shari Roberts then discusses the road movies of Clint Eastwood as a means of illuminating the Western's influence, and the patriarchal relation between genre and gender this influence imparts. Part II's "American Roads" begins with Steven Cohan's essay on the Hollywood road movies of the 1940s and 1950s (*Detour,* Hope/Crosby, etc.), and their expression of various postwar attitudes toward Hollywood itself. This essay is a nice complement to Corey Creekmur's "fame" essay of Part I, and to self-reflexive genre studies generally. Subsequent essays cover the television show "Route 66," two of Russ Meyer's films; *Easy Rider*'s ambivalent portrayal of the American landscape; and "yuppie critique and the buddy-road movie in the 1980s."

The "Alternative Routes" of Part III focus on American road movies that challenge the genre's typically straight white male point of view/driver, and on road movies of non-American landscapes, specifically Italy and Australia. Stephen Elliot's *The Adventures of Priscilla, Queen of the Desert* figures prominently here, mentioned in most of these essays, discussed in depth by two of them. The first, "Home and Away," by Pamela Robertson, uses *The Wizard of Oz* as a frame of reference for discussing *Priscilla* in terms of its contradictory, ultimately limited articulation of national culture ("home") and gay identity ("away"). The second, "Disassociated Masculinities and Geographies of the Road," by Stuart C. Aitken and Christopher Lee Lukinbeal, makes a similar point about *Priscilla*'s short-sighted attempt at "liberatory masculinity"; the authors prefer that of *My Own Private Idaho* and *Paris, Texas.* Sharon Willis discusses "race on the road" in *Boys on the Side* and *To Wong Foo,* showing how these contemporary Hollywood road movies couch themes of racial difference and homosexuality in a fairy tale/farce context, ultimately reiterating the very conservative notions about race and gender they pretend to challenge. Robert Lang's essay on *My Own Private Idaho* and Katie Mills' on *The Living End* treat each of these films for how they "revitalize" (Mills) the genre. Lang is more tempered in his evaluation of *Idaho*'s rejection of "family values" via a simple substitution of gay for straight characters, while Mills sees *The Living End* as successfully transcending the trappings of typical genre revisionism. Delia Falconer's essay on the *Mad Max* trilogy and Angelo Restivo's on *Il Sorpasso* and Italy's autostrada both nicely focus on how film narrative's portrayal of the road may reflect anxieties about a changing national identity, anxieties related to the meaning of mobility through a modernizing/postmodern landscape.

This summary of *The Road Movie Book*'s contents reveals a wide range of topics, which produces both strengths and shortcomings. *The Road Movie Book* surveys the uncharted territory of road movie studies in a multitude of directions, fruitfully and forcefully conveying how integral the road movie is to film history and to American culture at large. Moreover, these essays cause us to consider what constitutes a road movie. We all know that strict definitions, distinctions, and categories within genre study are often problematic and slippery, and yet we need them, if only to begin discussing a genre critically. This is where *The Road Movie Book* falters, yielding a residual effect of dilution, at times a lack of precision, regarding what makes a road movie a road movie.

The collection's first essay, Bennet Schaber's "Hitler Can't Keep 'Em That Long," is symptomatic in this respect, an ambitious, intriguing, but unwieldy work that mentions so many films and makes so many tenuous connections that it reads like a series of traffic jams and off-ramps. More significant is the author's observation that "far from designating a genre merely, the phrase 'road movie' can be taken to express a cinematic concept" (22). This comment is telling for how it anticipates the pitfall of some of the following essays: conceiving "road movie" too expansively. Is a road movie any film with characters moving from one place to another, or with some transportation sequences? If so, that's most movies. If so, too, then we could submit the "house movie" or the "office building movie"—which doesn't make much sense.

One example of what I mean is Barbara Klinger's claim, in her essay "The Road to Dystopia," that "the traveling quest" figures "explicitly in such road trip fare" as *Alice's Restaurant* and *Midnight Cowboy* (180). Well, I rented *Alice's Restaurant* recently, and most of it takes place . . . in and around Alice's Restaurant. As for *Midnight Cowboy,* it too

stays mainly in Manhattan, with less driving or mobility than another New York non-road movie, *Taxi Driver.* This fuzzy perspective regarding genre becomes exacerbated when the author confuses some of *Easy Rider*'s details: wrong first Byrd's song ("Wasn't Born to Follow," not "Ballad of Easy Rider"); wrong cinematographer (Laszlo Kovacs, not Haskell Wexler). Despite its compelling discussion of the film's radical and conformist uses of landscape imagery, Klinger's essay proves equally frustrating because she presents her argument about *Easy Rider*'s contradictory politics as if it comes out of nowhere, when in fact this issue has been explored by, among others, Ryan and Kellner (*Camera Politica,* 1988), David James (*Allegories of Cinema,* 1989), and most recently Lee Hill in her 1996 BFI monograph.

Another way in which the anthology muddies the road movie's generic waters is the reference many essays make to *The Wizard of Oz* as a kind of godfather "master narrative" for the road movie. Perhaps the film is an archetype deeply embedded in the road movie's unconscious—along with Homer's *Odyssey.* More to the point, let us recall that Dorothy never goes anywhere; her "journey" is but a dream; and all she wants in this dream is to get back home. Beyond the film's overall wholesome, conservative, and benign tone (not very road movie-esque), there's probably more screen and story time devoted to her in Kansas, Oz, and the wicked witch's castle than on that yellow brick road.

The Road Movie Book's focus on comedies likewise seems questionable. Whether a distinct genre or a "cinematic concept" broader than "road movie," comedy seems to often overshadow other genres it mingles with. Thus, *Blazing Saddles* is more of a comedy than a Western (Blockbuster keeps it in the comedy section). So too for the road movie, comedy tends to use the road trip as mere pretext for comic situations, which often results in a road trip not really about being on the road. In "Almost Like Being at Home," Steven Cohan notes that while musicals "have discernible road elements," "not many actually make the road itself central to their narratives" (116). I think the same might be true of the "showbiz" films he discusses—mostly comedies, mostly about "being at home" (i.e., stability, comfort). Sharon Willis's analysis of *Boys on the Side* and *To Wong Foo* seems to lose sight of them as road movies because, perhaps, they're not really road movies, but comedies about some people going somewhere. This is not at all to suggest that road movies can't have any humor, or that there are no road movie comedies (*It Happened One Night, Sullivan's Travels,* and *Lost in America* come to mind as true road movie comedies). In any case, the anthology's attention to these semi- or pseudo-road movies may have had a price. None of the following classics from the genre's early 1970s glory days are discussed: *Two Lane Blacktop, Vanishing Point, Boxcar Bertha, Badlands, Paper Moon, The Sugarland Express, Thieves Like Us, The Last Detail, The Getaway,* and *Dirty Mary, Crazy Larry.*

A more exemplary approach is found in Katie Mills' "Revitalizing the Road Movie Genre," which struck me as most eloquent for its keen sense of the road movie's generic contours and history (a generic framework, by the way, consistent with both the Corrigan and Atkinson pieces cited above; the editors cite them too in their introduction, but broaden their generic scope). Her analysis of *The Living End* as a deconstructive revision of the genre begins with: "If we find nothing else unanimous about adventure road films, we might agree that they appeal to that darker side of people's psyches where rebellion thrives, wild and free" (307). Now we're talking road movies. She addresses the film's gay take on the outlaw couple, the stylistic influences of the French New Wave and the American avant-garde, and the essential rebellious foregrounding of the journey, which "provides a performative space for imaginative revisions of identity and society" (307). Most importantly, her essay never loses sight of the film's integration of driving, road imagery, and mobility into its visual, narrative, and political fabric. It is true that the essay's tight road movie consciousness derives partially from the film's overt self-consciousness as a road movie.

But this only brings us back to some of the authors' questionable film choices, and to the anthology's perhaps too widely dispersed sense of what makes a road movie. Yet, as I hope these queries imply, *The Road Movie Book* travels far in facilitating such inquiry.

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Book Notes

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Carroll, Noel. *Theorizing the Moving Image.* New York: Cambridge University Press, 1996. This volume collects nearly thirty of Noel Carroll's lively essays on cinema and film theory. Along with David Bordwell, Carroll has been nudging the field of film studies away from grand issues of high theory and toward the investigation of smaller, more narrowly defined and researchable issues of structure and effect. In these clear and cogent essays, Carroll offers insightful discussions of the properties of cinema and the viewer's experience. His topics include the emotional power of movies, the intelligibility of point-of-view editing, a theory of film suspense, the ways in which movie music works, and an extended criticism of the medium-specific assumptions of traditional film theory (i.e., the attempts to understand cinema through appeal to its allegedly unique properties). Carroll's polemical exchanges with film scholars (e.g., Stephen Heath, Richard Allen) are included, and these show the conceptual rifts and methodological controversies that have produced so much ferment in the field of late. For many film scholars, Carroll himself is a controversial figure, and his

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spirited attacks on some of the field's most cherished assumptions have aroused antipathy. But his skepticism toward established film theory has stimulated debates that are healthy for the field. Moreover, Carroll has helped lead the cognitive turn in recent film theory and has thereby helped expand the range of theory and evidence available to film scholars. Readers interested in the terms of contemporary debate in film theory will find this volume to be an essential reference.

Stephen Prince

Williams, Tony. *Larry Cohen: The Radical Allegories of an Independent Filmmaker.* Jefferson, NC: McFarland, 1997. Larry Cohen's independent and iconoclastic work as a screenwriter and director of mainly pulp material has ranged across a wide array of genres, including blaxploitation *(Black Caesar, Hell Up in Harlem),* horror *(Q—the Winged Serpent, It's Alive III),* Westerns *(Return of the Seven),* political satire *(The Private Files of J. Edgar Hoover)* and television drama *(NYPD Blue).* Tony Williams provides a detailed survey and analysis of Cohen's work in feature film and television. Williams is a sympathetic chronicler of Cohen's career and a keen analyst of his work. He argues that Cohen's low-budget independent productions have enabled him to radically comment upon American society "in a manner unthinkable in any mainstream big-budget production." Cohen comments upon his work in an extensive interview with Williams and in a lengthy statement on the virtues of guerrilla filmmaking. A unique book, this is the most extended, detailed and in-depth treatment available on this maverick director and his work.

Stephen Prince

Eyman, Scott. *The Speed of Sound: Hollywood and the Talkie Revolution 1926-1930.* New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997. $30.00. "All of us in pictures are so frightened." So reported Clara Bow to *Motion Picture Classic* in 1928, after Warner Brothers' *The Jazz Singer* revolutionized the medium. Scott Eyman charts the development and transition of film from silent to sound. By dividing the book into five sections, each focusing on a single year from 1926 to 1930, Eyman charts the leaps and bounds of sound recording, mapping how these "improvements" demolished an art form that was at its prime at the time of its demise. Bow's plaintive statement is emblematic of the author's approach to this period. The book also acts as an elegiac tribute to the silent era, crosscutting from what Eyman sees as some of its greatest achievements *(Sunrise, The Crowd, Seventh Heaven)* to the ominous developments of pioneering sound engineers such as Stanley Watkins and Lee De Forest (throughout the book, Eyman meticulously chronicles minute technological details).

Framing the book around the production histories of *Sunrise* and *The Jazz Singer,* Eyman contrasts the decline and fall of the two men who headed the studios responsible for the films: William Fox and Jack Warner. Fox, Eyman writes, ran a studio that held the highest critical reputation and artistic quality; his was the studio that housed John Ford, Frank Borzage, and its newly acquired immigrant, F.W. Murnau. Warner, on the other hand, shrewdly headed a studio responsible for quick, workman-like productions. These tensions between high and low art, the sublime and the trivial, fuel Eyman's historical project.

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Matt Severson

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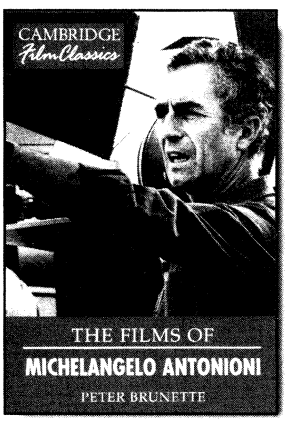

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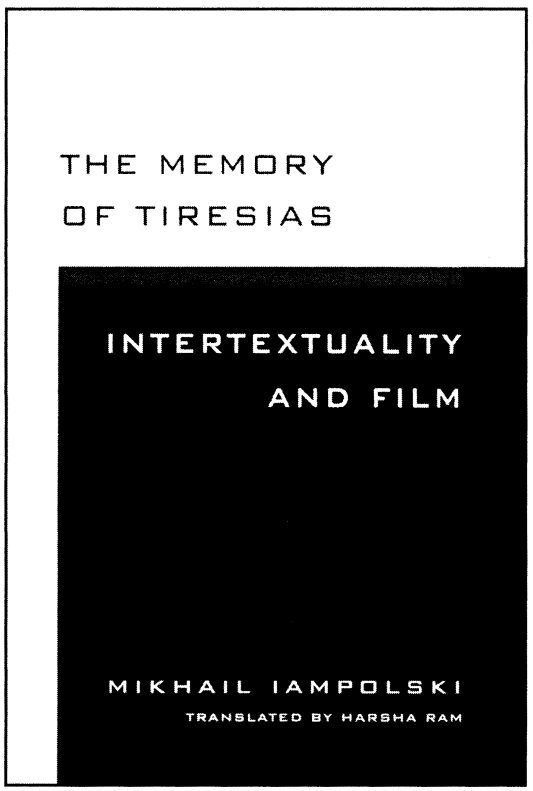

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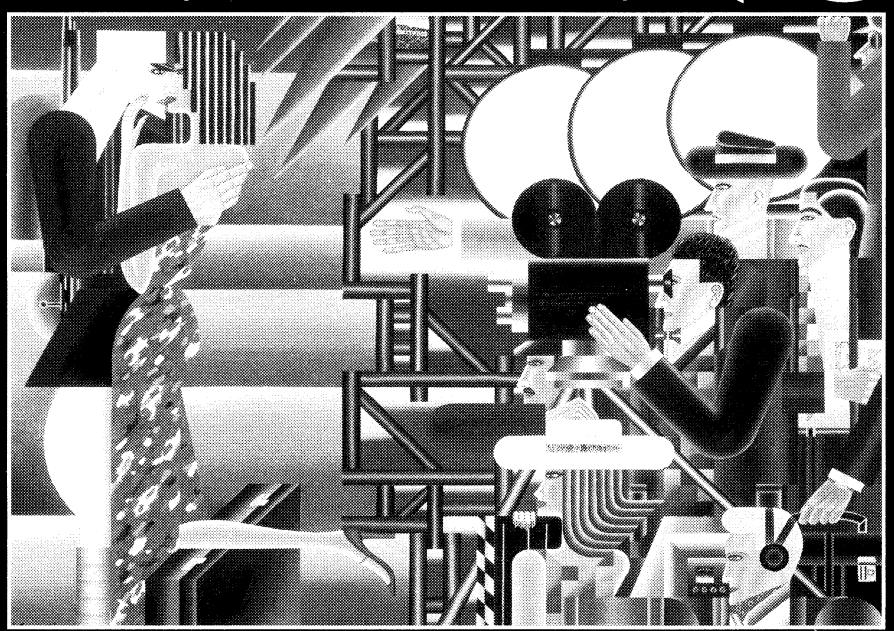

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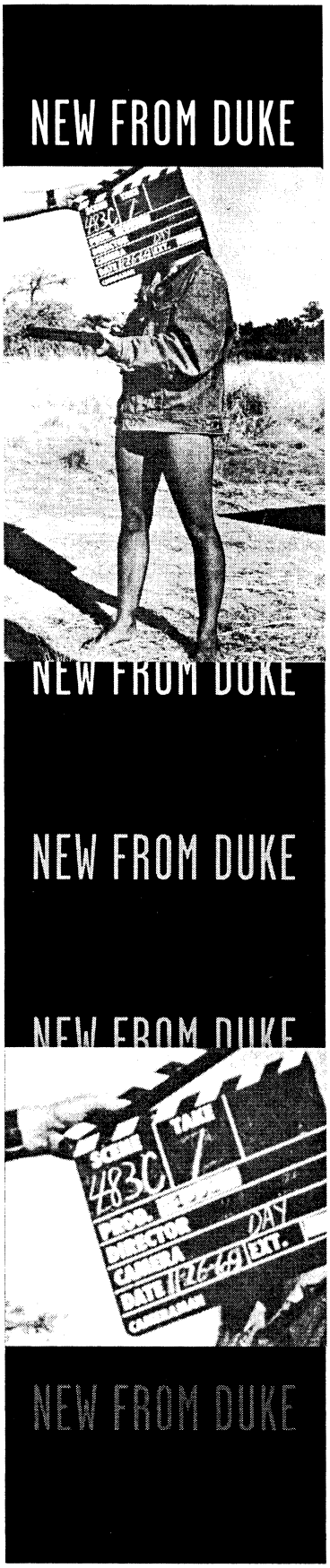

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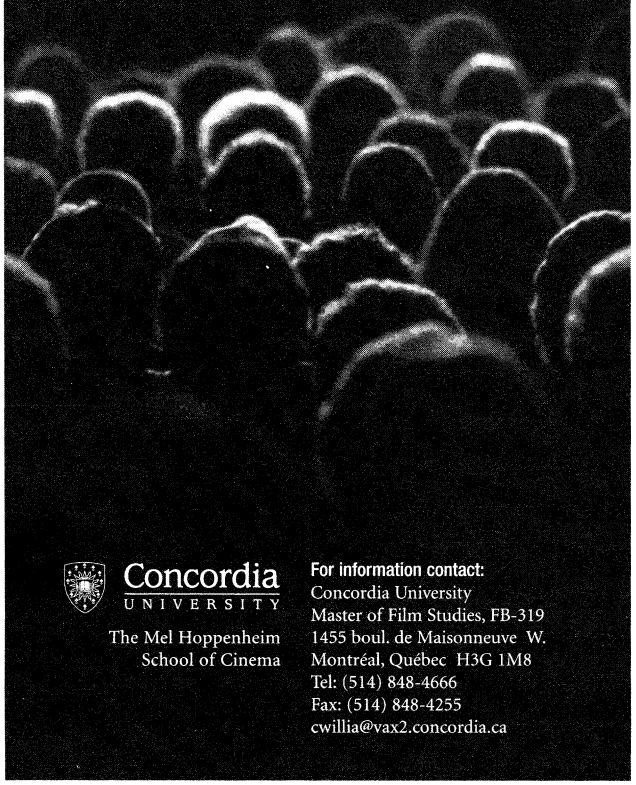

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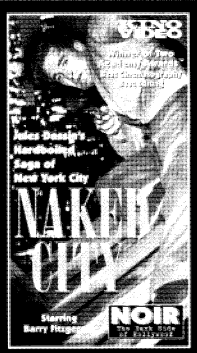

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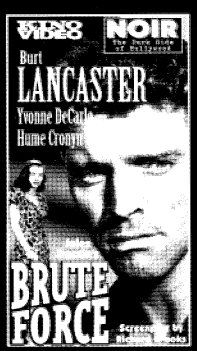

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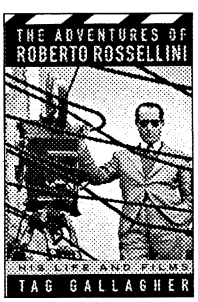

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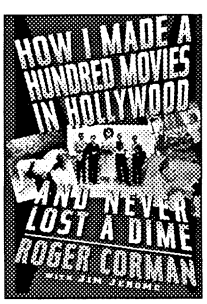

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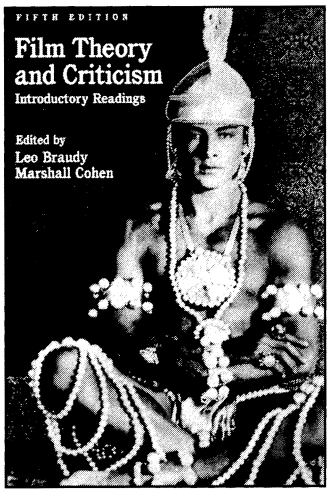

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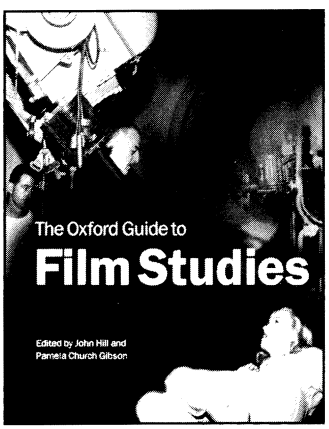

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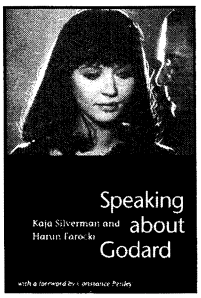

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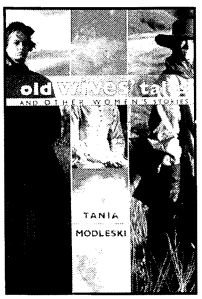

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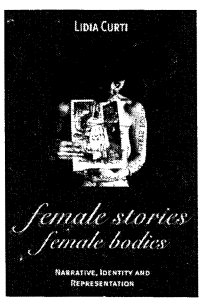

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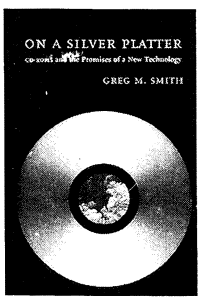

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